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The essential football magazine

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AFRICAN NATIONS SPECIAL

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368 players
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Cover: Sven Goran Eriksson

EDITOR
Gavin Hamilton
ART EDITOR
Gary Payne
PRODUCTION EDITOR
Peter Neish
PICTURE EDITOR
Duncan Bond
NEWS EDITOR
Jamie Rainbow
EDITORIAL SECRETARY
June Hiscock
PICTURES
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Thanks this issue to
Mike Hughes, David Rallis

EDITORIAL
King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7261 5737
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7261 7474
E-mail: world_soccer@ipcmedia.com

ADVERTISING
Greg Dunbar, Simon Gerard, Alex Mills
ADVERTORIALS AND SPONSORSHIP
Matt Johnston
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Tom Jennings
PRODUCTION CONTROLLER
Yee Lei Sheng

MANAGING DIRECTOR Paul Williams
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Hamish Dawson

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Classified Ads +44 (0) 20 7261 2823
Insert sales +44 (0) 20 7261 7710
Back issues +44 (0) 20 7261 5714
Binders +44 (0) 20 8519 3969

International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 7261 7715 or 7082
E-mail: Siriliya_Nawalkar@ipcmedia.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT
Rockwood House,
9-17 Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath,
West Sussex RH16 3DH, England
Tel: +44 (0) 1444 475 675

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FEBRUARY 2006

WORLD SOCCER comment

NATURALLY, the African Nations Cup in Egypt dominates our coverage this month. Our tournament preview issue is always enjoyable to work on, not least because the vast majority of the European media ignore the competition. I always get a buzz from reading about players and teams that not even the most knowledgeable European observer could claim to know everything about.

The cliche runs that Africa remains the great untapped – some might say, unexploited – region of world football. Yet the reality is that African players are already well established at the highest level of European football. With Samuel Eto'o and Didier Drogba among the most feared strikers in the world game, the chances of an African player scoring the winning goal in a UEFA Champions League Final increase every year.

Europe's biggest clubs are now signing African players because their faces fit, not because the transfer prices are right. A few years ago, it would have been hard to envisage Manchester United and Chelsea scrapping over the signature of John Obi Mikel, the Nigerian teenager whom the world should see playing at senior level for the first time in Egypt.

When such wealthy clubs as Chelsea and United go to great lengths to sign a talent like Mikel, it is hard to take seriously their complaints about the timing of the Nations Cup. Of course it is frustrating for clubs to lose players just at the stage of the season when injuries are starting to kick in. But the clubs – be they Bolton or Barcelona – know the score when they sign African players; they just can't help themselves. And how many players, bolstered by their European salaries, have actually boycotted the Nations Cup to stay with their clubs? Hardly any.

Over the next five months, as we count down to the World Cup, the club-country debate is set to intensify. There needs to be compromise on both sides. The clubs can't complain about their players arriving back from international duty tired or injured when they themselves embark on gruelling pre-season marketing tours. Similarly, national teams and federations have to accept a degree of responsibility. We're still playing too many games – the unloved Club World Championship, reviewed on page 52, springs to mind – and there must be a way of incorporating the Nations Cup properly into the international calendar.

At the moment, the African finals are out on a limb, isolated and unloved in Europe. But let's at least enjoy them for what they once again promise to be: a unique showcase of football talent.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor (gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com)

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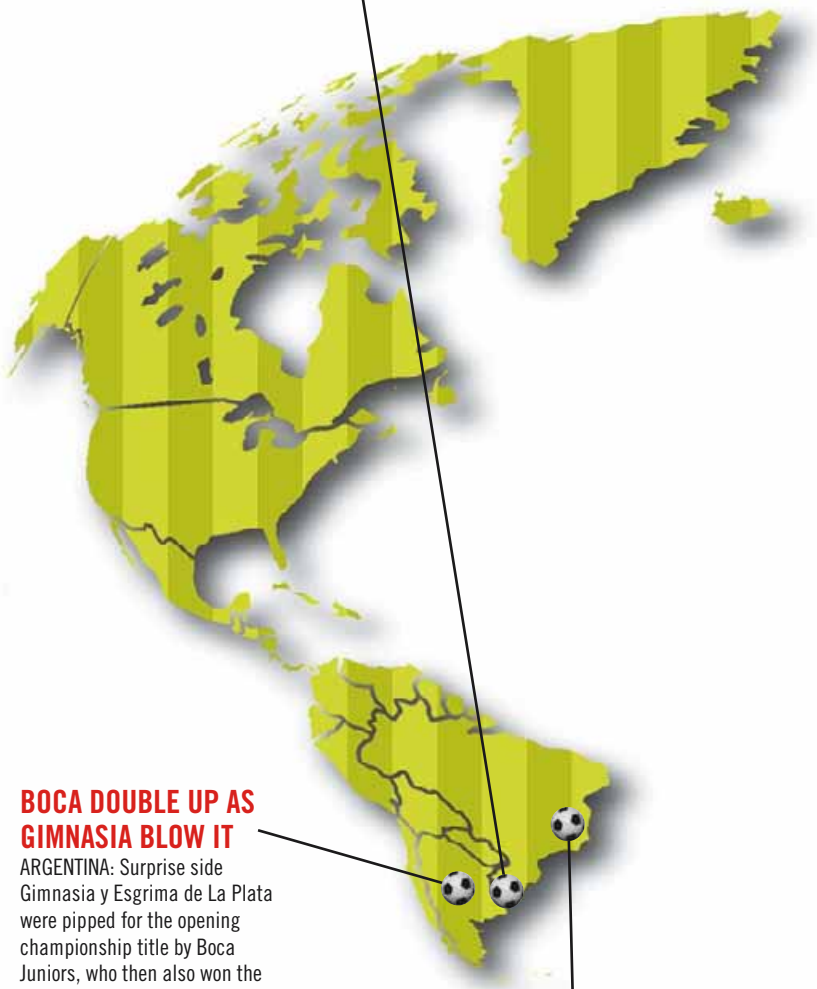
TEVEZ HONOURED AGAIN

URUGUAY: Argentinian Carlos Tevez has been voted Latin American player of the year for a record third time in the prestigious award organised by the *El Pais* newspaper. **Page 6**



BOCA DOUBLE UP AS GIMNASIA BLOW IT

ARGENTINA: Surprise side Gimnasia y Esgrima de La Plata were pipped for the opening championship title by Boca Juniors, who then also won the Sudamericana Cup. **Page 64**

LUXEMBURGO BACK AT SANTOS

BRAZIL: The coach has returned to his former club a year after leaving for Real Madrid. **Page 66**

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AFRICAN NATIONS CUP SPECIAL

Complete guide to the 16 teams taking part in the 25th finals tournament, in Egypt. **Page 20**

SCRAMBLE FOR LARSSON

SWEDEN: Henrik Larsson's decision to return home from Barcelona in the summer will almost certainly spark a tug of war among local clubs. **Page 58**

TEETHING TROUBLES

GERMANY: The World Cup organising committee have had to deal with structural faults at the host stadiums and concerns about security and ticketing arrangements. **Page 18**

FOURNIER CHOPPED BY PSG

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain sacked their coach Laurent Fournier, who had been in the position only since February. **Page 55**

REVAMPED BUT NOT REVIVED

JAPAN: Sao Paulo won the second FIFA Club World Championship but a rethink of the competition is needed if it is to survive. **Page 52**

SOCCEROOS AVOID THE BIG GUNS

AUSTRALIA: The national side received a major boost when they were handed a favourable draw for the 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers. **Page 68**

NO SIGN OF A CURE

SPAIN: Real Madrid's signing of Antonio Cassano from Roma and Cicinho from Sao Paulo has failed to solve fundamental problems at the ailing club. **Page 14**

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● 09/12/05

And the hosts will play…Germany's group is determined at the World Cup finals draw in Leipzig

● 11/12/05

Pre-match ritual…the players of Al Ahly and Al Ittihad line up before the first game of the Club World Championship in Japan

● 15/12/05

Getting through…Peter Crouch, the scorer of two goals, finds a way past the Saprissa defence during Liverpool's 3-0 Club World semi-final win

HEADLINERS

CARLOS TEVEZ

Player of the Year in the Americas for the third time running

FOR THE THIRD successive year Argentina's Carlos Tevez was voted best player in the Americas in the prestigious awards organised by Uruguayan newspaper *El Pais* since 1986. Colombia's Carlos Valderrama is the only other player to have won it more than once – in 1987 and 1993 – and the reason so few winners have repeated their success is that only players based in the Americas are eligible. In recent times, of course, very few top South American players have remained in the continent long enough to stake a repeated claim.

However, Tevez – who won the award in 2003 and 2004 for his exploits with Boca Juniors – made the surprise move to Brazil to join Corinthians at the start of last year and was a key figure in their championship-winning campaign.

The Corinthians fans took to him immediately, his determination being totally in line with the tradition of the club. But his assimilation was far from easy. He had a number of training ground bust-ups with team-mates and even found

> **'Corinthians fans took to him immediately, his determination being in line with the tradition of the club'**

himself abused by referees. He was also shocked that the press referred to him as a "gringo", the pejorative word Brazilians use to describe foreigners. "I'm getting the feeling that an Argentinian is not allowed to succeed in Brazil," he said in September. "I don't know how long I'm going to put up with all of this."

But he played through the problems, scoring 20 goals and setting up plenty more with his dribbling, strength on the turn and awareness around the box. Corinthians won the title and Tevez was acclaimed as the player of the championship.

The pressure will be back on this year, with Corinthians desperate to win the Libertadores Cup and then move on to contest the Club World Championship. Doing well in the latter tournament has become even more important since the victory of local rivals Sao Paulo in Japan last December.

The 21-year-old has already won the Libertadores and the World Club Cup – the forerunner of the Club World trophy – with Boca. After this year it is difficult to see what else he could achieve by staying in South America. Tevez, then, may still be eligible for the *El Pais* award in 2006. But afterwards he will surely be out of the running.

Tim Vickery

Third in a row…Tevez picks up the award yet again

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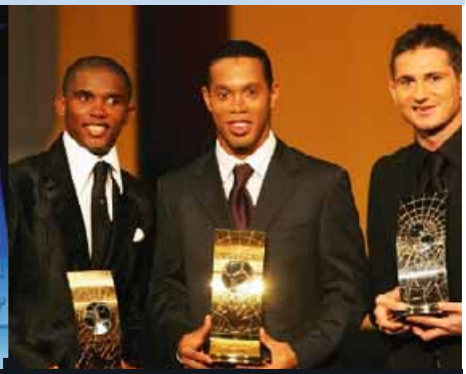
● 16/12/05

Sorted…the draw for the UEFA Champions League first knockout round is made in Nyon



● 19/12/05

On the podium…FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldinho is flanked by third-placed Samuel Eto'o and runner-up Frank Lampard

THIERRY HENRY

The Arsenal captain has pledged his future to the club

THIERRY HENRY has told Arsenal he wants to stay at the club and lead the Gunners out at their new stadium next season. "The truth is I love this club and I've made my mind up to stay," the captain said. "I can say to all my fans and the people who care about me I want to lead the team out in the new stadium.

"The truth is this: I never spoke with or met with a single person from any other club at any time."

Barcelona's interest is unlikely to fade, however. After all, Henry's contract does not expire until summer 2007 and there is no need for him to agree anything until late this year.

The worst scenario for Arsenal would be the Frenchman leading the team out at their new home at the start of the season and then being sold before the August 31 deadline.

Decision to stay…Henry

CHRISTIAN VIERI

Moving to Monaco to boost his World Cup chances with Italy

Monte Carlo or bust…Vieri

ITALY STRIKER Christian Vieri was one of the highest-profile movers when the January transfer window opened, joining Monaco from Milan, where he has featured only sporadically since arriving from city rivals Internazionale last summer.

"I'm convinced he still could have done great things at Milan," said chief executive Adriano Galliani. "But he's not been on the pitch much here, and in a World Cup year I understand his motives for leaving."

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Numbers game

878…

the number of Brazilian players transferred abroad in 2005.

£15m…

the sum invested in Portsmouth by Russian businessman Alexandre Gaidamak.

185…

the number of goals scored for Juventus by Alessandro Del Piero, a club record, after a hat-trick against Fiorentina in the Italian Cup. The previous record of 182 had been set by Giampiero Boniperti in 1961.

2…

the number of Espanyol fans suspended by the club for racially abusing their own goalkeeper, Cameroonian Carlos Kameni, during a League match against Barcelona.

6…

the number of weeks Philippe Troussier spent in charge of the Moroccan national side before being sacked after the federation refused his demands to hand-pick his staff.

£10,000…

the sum paid by Hakan Sukur and Hasan Sas to help cash-strapped Galatasaray pay the wages of cleaners and groundsmen at the club.

● 29/12/05

Real thing…new signing Cicinho shows off his skills at the Bernabeu

● 31/12/05

Crunch time…Michael Owen breaks a bone in his foot playing for Newcastle at Tottenham, putting him out of action for at least two months

● 01/01/06

Victory parade…Urawa Reds players are mobbed by fans after winning the Emperor's Cup in Japan

WS WORLD SOCCER Brian Glanville

…on why Gareth Barry should be in the England frame…how Mourinho deserves credit for using wingers…Sol Campbell and the ticking clock…and why Jesse Carver deserves to be remembered

ASTON VILLA manager David O'Leary was right to press the claims of Gareth Barry as England's left-back after his assured display in the 0-0 draw with Arsenal at Villa Park.

Barry has long impressed me but his international chances have been meagre. It is said Sven Goran Eriksson feels he lacks the necessary pace, but how can one give any credence to Eriksson's views on the subject when, in the November friendly against Argentina in Geneva, he ludicrously recalled Wayne Bridge, who had played just an hour for Chelsea all season? Predictably, Bridge looked rusty and uncertain, and it was no surprise when he allowed winger Maxi Rodriguez to get past him to set up one of Argentina's goals.

Staking his claim…Barry beats Ljungberg to get in a header against Arsenal

'It is said Eriksson feels Barry lacks the necessary pace…but he was never in any trouble through being outpaced against Arsenal'

Besides, Barry was never in any trouble through being outpaced against Arsenal and even produced one of the game's best attempts on goal, hitting a wickedly swerving shot from way out that keeper Jens Lehmann only just managed to block.

CREDIT is due to the voluble Jose Mourinho, whose all-conquering Chelsea team have so often been criticised for being merely functional when they should, with all those stars, be effervescent. That is hardly fair when Mourinho has the enterprise and courage to deploy two true wingers, and two of the finest in Europe at that. The dazzling Arjen Robben and Damien Duff ran West Ham ragged at Upton Park as Chelsea won 3-1.

Robben is a devastating force when in form, always prepared to run at the opposition, never taking the easy way out.

Given the reluctance of our club managers to use flank players – ever since the days of Alf Ramsey's World Cup-winning wingless wonders – it is refreshing and heartening to see a club as successful as Chelsea deploying two such attackers.

But what of Joe Cole? While he has been making the best of his role on Chelsea's flanks in recent weeks, he is not really a winger at all. Yet Mourinho, who appears to practise the Pavlovian psychology of alternating stimuli – now eulogising him, now disparaging him – feels that the flanks are where Cole belongs. Having recently described him as "untouchable", while at the same time giving us a list of Cole's supposed previous deficiencies (the implication being he owes his improvement to Mourinho himself), the manager then threatened to drop him after the win against Birmingham, accusing him of "playing for himself".

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● 03/01/06

Kicking off…Reyes of Arsenal lies injured while Man Utd players Giggs and Rooney argue with referee Poll during the 0-0 draw

● 04/01/06

Real thing 2…Antonio Cassano is greeted by Madrid vice-president Emilio Butragueno

Mourinho then announced he was giving Cole four days off, which on the face of it seemed less of a privilege than a punishment. It meant, though, that Chelsea played both Duff and Robben on the wings. So where does that leave Cole?

WHILE we are on the subject, remember how Cole left Arsenal's Sol Campbell standing when he cut almost casually across him to score Chelsea's second goal in their 2-0 win at Highbury?

Campbell's hour has perhaps struck. Early in the Gunners' game at Villa Park, Campbell chopped down Milan Baros after the Czech had easily gone past him and left him with no chance of getting the ball. In the second half, Luke Moore, a much smaller man, beat Campbell to head the ball through to Baros, who luckily for Arsenal threw his chance away.

JESSE CARVER is dead. He died as long ago as November 2003, at the age of 92, but which of us even knew about it? Not I, who had known him so well – as well as one ever could, outside the players who adored him – and who had tracked him down to Bournemouth when he was 90.

Yet Carver surely deserved to be commemorated, even if his greatest triumphs were achieved in Italy. There, he coached Juventus to the championship in 1951 at the first time of asking, only to be sacked a few months later when he was duped into criticising the club's directors in an interview with *La Gazzetta Dello Sport*.

Carver had previously managed the Dutch national side, but walked out mid-contract, infuriating the federation. Such sudden departures would become a theme in his peripatetic career.

He had a brief but impressive spell in charge of West Bromwich Albion in the early 1950s, the squad enjoying his unorthodox methods. These included letting the players train with the ball – something that was widely discouraged then, believe it or not – and getting them to do loosening-up exercises.

Before the war, Carver, a Liverpudlian, was a centre-half with Newcastle and Huddersfield. He spent the war years as a policeman.

I saw much of him when I was living in Rome during the 1954-55 season and writing for *Corriere Dello Sport,* when Jesse (they couldn't even spell his name correctly on the Bournemouth death certificate) successfully managed Roma.

At the end of that season, he astonishingly returned to England, to take charge of Coventry City, then in the Third Division South, taking with him the shrewd little Yorkshire manager George Raynor, who had been in charge of rivals Lazio.

But, inevitably perhaps, he didn't stay long, returning to Italy to manage Inter, then Lazio. When he ran out of clubs, he begged Gigi Peronace, a player agent and his former interpreter, to find him another one, briefly coached at Tottenham, then retired in anonymity to the south coast.

'Carver coached Juventus to the 1951 title but was sacked when duped into criticising the directors'

Mr Unpredictable…Carver

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"Notes & quotes"

"Ghana have offered me a place in their team but I'm only interested in playing for the USA, hopefully at the World Cup in Germany."

MLS boy wonder Freddy Adu drops a hint to United States coach Bruce Arena.

"Against him, I close my eyes and pray."

Italy and Juventus central defender Fabio Cannavaro suggests Ronaldo is not on the decline.

"We will not achieve greater quality in our game by piling up the games."

Holland coach Marco Van Basten voices his discontent at the decision to schedule Dutch League games during the Christmas holidays for the first time in 40 years.

Impressed…Maradona with Messi

"Argentina must celebrate. It's obvious to everyone that the kid will soon be a leader."

Diego Maradona falls under the spell of Lionel Messi.

"It's time to go fishing."

UEFA president Lennart Johansson announces that he will not seek re-election when his term ends next year.

"In the future, half of the team should come from our youth ranks."

New Real Madrid sports director Benito Floro whistles in the wind.

● 04/01/06

Seeing the Light…Laurent Robert enters the pitch at Benfica's stadium after joining from Portsmouth

● 05/01/06

Anfield arrival…Dutch defender Jan Kromkamp signs for Liverpool from Villarreal

● 06/01/06

Loan ranger…Dinamo Moscow midfielder Maniche is welcomed at Chelsea by fellow Portuguese Jose Mourinho

far and wide

Colombian striker shot dead

COLOMBIAN INTERNATIONAL Elson Becerra became the latest victim of his country's gun culture when he was shot and killed, along with a friend, in a nightclub while on holiday in the coastal resort of Cartagena. Some reports said the striker, who played his club football in the United Arab Emirates for Al Jazeera, had been seen arguing with his attackers several days earlier.

Becerra, nicknamed *El Chocolatin* (little chocolate), was a member of the Colombia team that won the Copa America in 2001 and played in several 2006 World Cup qualifiers. He will also be remembered for his attempts, sadly in vain, to help Marc-Vivien Foe after the Cameroon midfielder collapsed on the field during a Confederations Cup semi-final in 2003.

Becerra was the 12th Colombian player to be shot dead in the past 20 years. The most famous victim was Andres Escobar, who was murdered after returning from the 1994 World Cup finals, where Colombia had been surprisingly eliminated in the first round.

In 2004, Albeiro Usuriaga, who helped Colombia qualify for Italia 90, was shot and killed when several gunmen opened fire in a nightclub in Cali.

Killed on holiday…Becerra

False alarm…Dougal

Molar misery

Scottish referee Stuart Dougal will not forget his trip to Sicily for the UEFA Cup tie between Palermo and Brondby in a hurry. During the match the 43-year-old official somehow managed to lose a denture containing four false teeth. Unable to find it straight away, he, his two assistants and three stadium officials staged a floodlit search after the game, but their efforts proved in vain and Douglas was forced to fly back to Scotland toothless.

Atletico cry off sick

Atletico Madrid were forced to postpone a home Spanish Cup tie against Real Zaragoza after the players and coaching staff were hit by a bout of food poisoning, leaving coach Carlos Bianchi unable to put together a team. However, midfielder Gabi, one of the worst affected, reckoned all was not what it seemed. "They tell us it's food poisoning," he said, "but some players who didn't eat have also got it. It's affecting all of us and we don't know where it's coming from."

Cue that haunting *X-Files* theme tune…

Hagi pays for ref assault

Gheorghe Hagi, Romania's greatest ever player, got an early Christmas present when an Istanbul court "merely" fined him rather than put him in jail for his misbehaviour during a League game with Galatasaray more than four years ago. Hagi had been charged with kicking, spitting and insulting referee Erol Ersoy during the match, against Genclerbirligi, in 2001. But despite the apparent leniency of the judge, Hagi, who now coaches Poli Timisoara in his homeland, pronounced himself "disappointed" that he had been found guilty at all.

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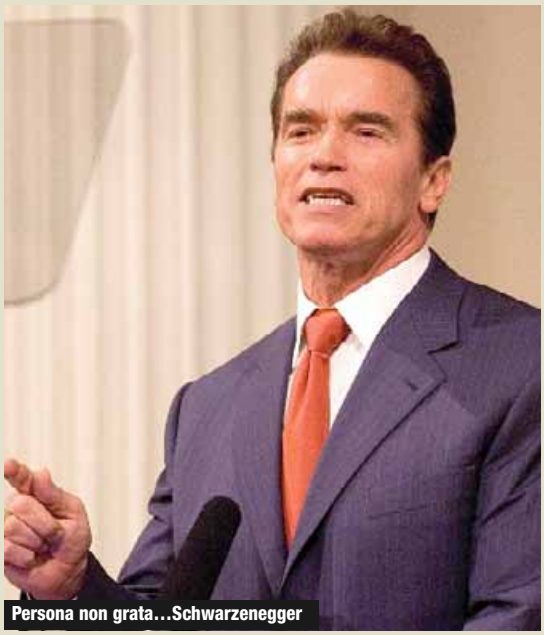
● 07/01/06

Air shot…Deco, one of the scorers, in action for Barcelona during their 2-1 win at neighbours Espanyol

● 07/01/06

Double ton…Newcastle's Alan Shearer equals Jackie Milburn's club record of 200 goals when scoring the winner against Mansfield in the FA Cup



Persona non grata…Schwarzenegger

Arnie's local difficulties

THE AUSTRIAN CITY of Graz has fallen out of love with former local hero Arnold Schwarzenegger following the California governor's refusal to grant pardons to three death-row prisoners. The city stadium, officially inaugurated as the Arnold-Schwarzenegger-Stadion with a match between local clubs Grazer AK and Sturm in July 1997, will from now on be known as plain Stadion Graz-Liebenau. All references to the movie star, including the giant letters spelling his name over the stadium's main entrance, were removed overnight.

No way, Jose

Hot news from Spain. *El Mundo Deportivo* published a story saying that Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard was going to marry his fiancee at Montserrat in Catalonia as a first step towards signing for Barcelona. On the same day, *Sport* reported that the Spanish taxman was chasing Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho over unpaid sums relating to his time at Barcelona and, as a result, he would not be able to come to Camp Nou for the Champions League match in February.

Both stories appeared on December 28, Spain's equivalent of April Fool's Day. The giveaway? The author of the *El Mundo Deportivo* story was given as JB (a make of whisky), while *Sport* credited Jack Daniels & Johnnie Walker, London.

Also that day, *AS* announced that Real Madrid were going to buy Josep Guardiola, while *Marca* claimed Madrid had signed racing driver Fernando Alonso and were going to enter a team in Formula 1.

Caught on camera

Duisburg coach Norbert Meier now has plenty of time to reflect on his moment of madness when he butted Koln midfielder Albert Streit during a recent Bundesliga fixture and then pretended he was the victim, falling theatrically to the ground and persuading the referee to send off the player. After seeing TV footage of the incident, Duisburg duly sacked him.

The replays showed the pair arguing on the touchline before Meier clearly butted Streit before hitting the deck himself. With the game up, the coach apologised to Streit and his employers for his "blackout", but the damage had been done.

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Shock…Burton v Man Utd

● The FA Cup…
shock results for non-League Burton Albion and Nuneaton Borough proves there's life in the old boy yet.

● Miroslav Klose…
the Werder Bremen striker was named the best outfield player of the first half of the German season in *Kicker* magazine's poll of Bundesliga players.

● Romario…
the 40-year-old striker signed a new one-year deal with Vasco da Gama, allowing him to continue his attempt to better Pele's record mark of more than 1,000 career goals.

GOOD MONTH FOR...

BAD MONTH FOR...

Knee damage…Frey

● Stephane and Wilfried Dalmat…
the French brothers faced disciplinary proceedings at Racing Santander after arriving back four days late from the Christmas break.

● Sebastien Frey…
the Fiorentina goalkeeper was ruled out for the rest of the season after damaging cruciate knee ligaments.

● Reinaldo Merlo…
quit as River Plate coach claiming he had been forced out by the players, led by former Argentina forward Marcelo Gallardo. River finished only sixth in the opening championship. Merlo's replacement is former national team boss Daniel Passarella, back for a second spell at the club.

● Emmanuel Adebayor…
the Togo striker was excluded from the Monaco squad for repeatedly missing training.

● Pierre Wome…
the defender was left out of Cameroon's squad for the African Nations Cup finals. Wome missed a penalty in the last World Cup qualifier, against Egypt; had he scored it, his team would have reached the finals.

● 08/01/06

Super stalemate…the players of non-League Burton celebrate after holding Man Utd to a 0-0 draw in the FA Cup

● 08/01/06

In control…Andrii Shevchenko shields the ball from Parma's Jorge Bolano during Milan's 4-3 home win, which put them second in Serie A

● 09/01/06

National importance…German coach Klaus Toppmoller is appointed to lead Georgia

Insult to injury

Why should clubs pay and risk losing their players on national team service?

WS WORLD SOCCER **Arsene Wenger**

INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL certainly has a place in the game and it would be a sad day if that ever changed, but the time has come to understand that we need to have a wider perspective.

There has long been talk about national associations paying compensation to clubs when their players go to play for their country, but that would never work. How could the Nigerian FA pay for Kanu's wages when he goes away to play for his country? How could the Ivory Coast pay Didier Drogba's or Kolo Toure's wages when they go away?

These associations don't have enough money to finance compensation payments, and only FIFA could help. The governing body makes a lot of money from the World Cup, and maybe there is a case for it to release some of that finance to compensate the clubs when players go away for long periods on international duty.

It must be the only business in the world where someone says: "I would like to take your best employees and do what I want with them for a few days. If they come back broken or injured, then it's your problem." Something will happen with the top European clubs very soon, and while I'm not saying they would ever stop their players going to the World Cup, we need to modify the fixture list.

It's especially difficult when you have back-to-back qualifying games because your players are away for two full weeks. They may have to do a lot of travelling, they may pick up an injury or risk themselves for their country, and then they come back jaded for the next Premiership game.

My solution would be to play international games earlier in the week. Maybe look at the squads meeting up on a Sunday, playing their first game on a Wednesday or a Thursday and then playing the second game over the weekend. That would give the players a full week to get back to their clubs and prepare for the next League game. It would be more reasonable because we are, after all, paying their wages while they are away with their national teams.

'Maybe FIFA should compensate clubs when players go away for long periods on international duty'

Arsenal have been affected badly by this problem in recent months. Thierry Henry and Gael Clichy were injured playing for France, as was Robin Van Persie for Holland, and Sol Campbell for England. There is nothing you can do. Your employee has been broken and it's up to you to fix him.

When you are dealing with South American players, the situation is even more difficult. In the last year, I have had Edu and Gilberto Silva going away with Brazil and you don't see them again until the Friday morning before a game on Saturday. They are tired and unable to play the next game, and it's not right when these national associations are taking employees that belong to us.

The national team coach has his own priority and is trying to do his job, but there has to be a degree of respect on this issue. You could say I would have a different view if I was ever to become an international manager, but I'd still see it from the point of view of the clubs. Anyway, I do not see myself being in charge of a national team any time soon.

When it comes to a major event like the World Cup, any coach would be interested in being involved. I go to most international tournaments and they are very special occasions, but when you think a finals may come around only once every two or four years, that would not be enough for me. I'm not interested in that sort of job because six to 10 games a year would not be stimulating enough. We play that many games in three weeks at Arsenal and I could not imagine waiting four months for my next match. I think I would end up coaching kids in between matches if I had only four or five games a year.

My philosophy is to work with players on a daily basis. The freedom I have to do my job at Arsenal is fantastic. Maybe I would not have the ability to do as I wish at other clubs in the world and that would certainly be the case in an international job.

Arsene Wenger was talking to Kevin Palmer

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No sign of a cure

Real Madrid's new signings have failed to solve fundamental problems at the ailing club

SID LOWE in Madrid

TWO YEARS AGO, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez ignored the requests of coach Carlos Queiroz for new players and insisted the club would never make signings during the winter transfer window. To do so, he argued, would be a sign of weakness, virtually admitting they had got it wrong in the summer.

But this January, Madrid have been chopping and changing like Henry VIII – and, like Henry VIII, it's not really done them much good. As one columnist put it, Perez is like one of those people who goes into the chemist and blindly tries pill after pill. One day, he might stumble across the cure, but he never goes to the doctor to find out what's actually wrong.

For a while now, Perez has indeed been prepared to try anything and everything. Dire straits call for desperate measures, and the old rule about quiet Christmases has gone out of the transfer window.

Last year, Madrid went into the winter market for the first time under Perez to sign Thomas Gravesen. They also brought in Arrigo Sacchi as director of football, who then brought in a new coach, former Brazil boss Vanderlei Luxemburgo.

Optimism returned. Gravesen was presented as the best player in Denmark, the man who turned down huge offers to come (never mind that he admitted Madrid were the only side to bid for him). Luxemburgo promised Brazilian brilliance. And Sacchi, described by Perez as "football crazy", would be at Madrid "for ever", imposing a more professional structure.

There was a sense that things were changing, a realisation that mistakes had been made and the galacticos policy was unsustainable. At last, decisions would be made that gave football a higher priority than commercialism.

It didn't work out. Luxemburgo was sacked, the third coaching casualty in less than two years. Gravesen barely plays and appears set to leave, possibly to Manchester United. And Sacchi has finally walked, having twice been prevented from resigning. Madrid, meanwhile, trailed leaders Barcelona by 13 points after 18 games, having scored the fewest goals (29) at that stage for 13 years.

Sacchi missed his family, but there was more to it than that. Galacticism has claimed another victim. "To tell the truth," the Italian said on departure, "I didn't entirely enjoy my work. I don't want to be paid money to do only part of a job. My role here in Madrid was different to the one I had at Parma. The post was the same, but things were done differently."

They certainly were. In the summer, Madrid signed Sergio Ramos, Robinho, Julio Baptista, Carlos Diogo and Pablo Garcia. Only Ramos was recommended by Sacchi; the rest were Perez's signings. So far, only Ramos has been an unqualified success.

Sacchi also advised against signing Antonio Cassano from Roma, insisting that while there is no doubting his talent, the Italian's arrival could cause real problems in the dressing-room. With Sacchi gone – replaced as sporting director by Benito Floro, who has consciously maintained a low profile – Madrid duly signed Cassano for £4million. And the club made another charge into the January market, bringing in £6.5m Brazilian full-back Cicinho from Sao Paulo.

Both are talented and, importantly, young. But Madrid have now spent £65m since the summer and the squad still looks unbalanced. There is not one left-sided midfielder and only one No 9, Ronaldo (plus youth-teamer Roberto Soldado). Meanwhile, Cicinho is a fourth right-back, alongside Diogo, Michel Salgado and Oscar Minambres, or even fifth, considering Ramos was a right-back, now converted to a central defender. Cassano is yet another who can play in the hole, just like Zinedine Zidane, Raul, Guti, Robinho, Baptista and even Gravesen, normally much deeper-lying.

Optimism tinged with fear

In the short term, Cassano will replace the injured Ronaldo as an out-and-out striker; in the long term there is little doubt that he has the ability to be a truly great player at Madrid from his more natural position further back. But for now, the optimism about the Italian is tinged with fear over the issue Sacchi warned about, even if Cassano did promise to be a good boy.

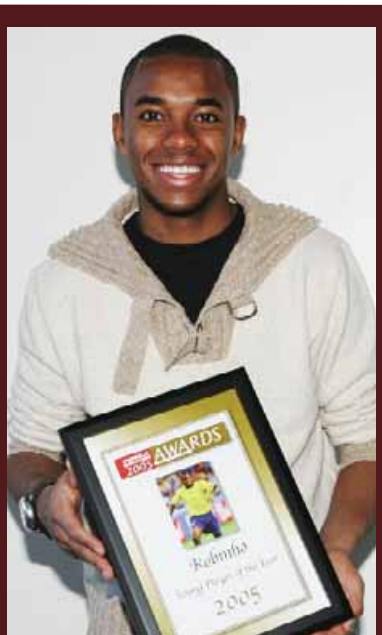
And there's more. *Marca* ran a photo of the new signing on their cover under the headline "*Blanco y radiante*" (Shining white) – exactly as they do for every Madrid signing. Frankly, they could also have described him as being a bit porky. Cassano, who has hardly trained because of a dispute with Roma before he left and the Christmas break, arrived 5kg overweight and unable to play at Villarreal. Fortunately, the one member of Luxemburgo's staff to stay on is nutritionist Patricia Teixeira, who immediately put him on a diet.

Cassano's signing was the most eye-catching of a quiet market. Indeed, the departures have been as significant as the arrivals – Jan Kromkamp left Villarreal for Liverpool, with Josemi going in the other direction, the underachieving Albert Riera left Espanyol for Manchester City, and Javi Gonzalez took the unusual trip from Athletic Bilbao to Israeli side SC Ashdod. Valencia offloaded Marcos Caneira and Marco Di Vaio to Sporting Lisbon and Monaco respectively, while Real Sociedad, heavily in debt, were trying to sell striker Nihat Kahveci while they still could, with Spartak Moscow and Newcastle mounting a fight for him.

Racing Santander were the busiest team in the market, making four new signings, including Sevilla's qualified doctor hard-man Pablo Alfaro and Damia, on loan from Barcelona.

Two other new signings made a dream start on their debuts – arriving and kissing the saint, as the Spanish put it. Ex-Atletico Madrid forward Angel Javier Arizmendi scored Deportivo La Coruna's winner at Athletic Bilbao, and Betis's new Brazilian striker Robert, brought in on loan from PSV Eindhoven to replace much-missed injury victim Ricardo Oliveira, lobbed a brilliant goal in the 1-1 draw with Mallorca.

Betis fans are getting rather excited about Robert, and why not? The last two Brazilian strikers to arrive in La Liga from PSV were Ronaldo and Romario. The *verdiblancos* are languishing in the relegation zone and how they could do with history repeating itself.



Winning smile…Robinho

Real Madrid star Robinho received *World Soccer's* Young Player of the Year award for 2005 during the Christmas break. The Brazil forward, who joined Madrid from Santos last summer, beat off competition from England's Wayne Rooney and Argentina starlet Lionel Messi.

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'Sacchi feared that Cassano's arrival could cause real problems in the Madrid dressing-room'

Me and my shadow…Cassano is tracked by a security guard at his unveiling in Madrid

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Same old story

The new year kicked off with Juventus on top and Paolo Di Canio in trouble

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

SURPRISE, SURPRISE, as the new year began, some very familiar protagonists were making waves in Italy. Juventus, freshly acquitted of the doping charges against them, maintained their iron grip on the Serie A contest, while Lazio's talismanic striker Paolo Di Canio put himself at the centre of another blazing row prompted by his Mussolini-Fascist sympathies.

Any vague hopes harboured by Juve's rivals that the Old Lady might have her winning rhythm interrupted by the Christmas/New Year break were rudely shattered. They beat Palermo 2-1 away in the League on January 7 and trounced Fiorentina 4-1 in the Cup three days later to go through to the last eight 6-3 on aggregate.

The victory in Sicily kept Juve nine points clear of Milan to round off a month of good news, following on from the mid-December acquittal on doping charges of club doctor Riccardo Agricola in a Turin appeal court judgement.

In November 2004, at the end of a controversial trial, Agricola had been given a 22-month suspended sentence for sporting fraud. The court found that he had administered prohibited substances, including erythropoietin (EPO), to Juventus players between 1994 and 1998, a highly successful period for the team.

That ruling was overturned by appeal court judge Gustavo Witzel. But we will have to wait for his *motivazioni* – a judge's

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written explanation for his verdict – to understand just why his view differed so radically from that of Giuseppe Casalbore, the judge in the original trial.

It may well be that Witzel felt that the 1989 law on sporting fraud simply does not apply to alleged doping practices. Also, the court may have chosen not to accept the evidence of independent medical experts who had claimed it was "almost certain" and "very probable" that Juventus had used EPO. The court may well have accepted the Juve defence line that Agricola and his staff had always acted in the best interests of the players.

Needless to say, the club were euphoric. Managing director Antonio Giraudo, who had been a defendant along with Agricola in the case, said: "This is a triumph for justice. For years we've been offended all over the world because of a theory that has now been destroyed, both in legal terms and for its suppositions. We have suffered very serious damage to our image. Who will ever repay us for that?"

Despite Juve's understandable jubilation, the affair still leaves some uncomfortable questions unanswered. Leaving aside the inevitable professional disagreements prompted by independent medical evidence with regard to EPO, what about the so-called "off-label" use of other drugs to make them, de facto, performance enhancing? "Off-label" use refers to the dispensing of specialised medical products such as Samyr (an anti-depressant), Neoton (used for heart patients) and Liposom Forte (used, among other things, for patients recovering from operations such as brain surgery). Why were such medicines given to Juventus players, who, presumably, were not depressed and had not undergone recent heart or brain surgery? Was it necessary for Juventus to maintain a well-stocked arsenal of 281 medicinal products, enough for a small hospital?

Zeman has his say

The final word, for now, goes to former Roma coach Zdenek Zeman, who had sparked the original investigation when claiming in summer 1998 that doping practices were widespread in Italian football and pointing a finger at Juventus in particular. "Even the appeal court verdict proves that I was right," he said. "In 1998, I said football had to get out of the pharmacy, and if there is one certainty to come out of these trials, it is that there has been abuse of pharmaceutical products. Of course, this trial should never have ended up in a judicial court. Sports disciplinary bodies, which ought to have moral and ethical guidelines that go far beyond the penal code, ought to have looked into the case, investigating not just Juventus but all Italian football at that time. But they did nothing."

Juventus are not new to controversy, and neither is Paolo Di Canio. On December 11, he prompted a major row by giving a straight-arm Fascist salute to the Lazio fans at the end of his team's 2-1 loss at Livorno. Faced with a whirlwind of outrage at the gesture, the forward merely promised to do it again. Indeed, he did, six days later, after being substituted during Lazio's 1-1 draw with Juventus. Di Canio did a similar "Roman Salute" at the end of the Rome derby in January 2005, eventually being fined £6,800 by the federation.

Repeat offender… Di Canio gives a Fascist salute during Lazio's home game against Juventus, six days after his salute at Livorno

Juve record…Del Piero

Alessandro Del Piero entered the Juventus record books when scoring a hat-trick in the 4-1 Italian Cup win against Fiorentina. The goals took the forward's overall tally at the club to 185, to outstrip the previous mark of 182, set by Giampiero Boniperti in 1961.

Coincidentally, Boniperti oversaw the signing of Del Piero from Padova in 1993, his last year as Juve president.

After the Livorno game, he did not shy from talking about his Fascist leanings. "I have huge admiration for a great leader [Mussolini], who in a particular historical context, if nothing else, was able to restore a sense of national pride," said Di Canio, who has the word "Dux" (*Il Duce*, Mussolini) tattooed on an arm. "I cannot stop myself saluting the fans that way. It's about expressing a sense of belonging to my people. At Livorno, I had to put up with awful insults about me and my mother but I still went out and played, and played well. I'm proud to be part of the Lazio people. When you have true values, you're always in the right."

To be fair to Di Canio, the Livorno-Lazio game needs to be put into its "political" context. A majority of Livorno fans make no secret of their left-wing leanings, while the right-wing, if not Fascist tendencies, of a section of the Lazio fans is well documented. In that context, when the Lazio team bus arrived at the Livorno stadium, it was hit by a smoke flare-cum-firework, which caused alarm, though no injuries. Di Canio pointed out that Italian media coverage of the Livorno incident had made much of his salute but played down the significance of the attack on the bus.

However, the forward then sounded a distinctly unpleasant note when replying to protests from Rome's Jewish community. He said: "If a fine was to be imposed [on me] because one particular community was enraged, that would be very dangerous. If we're now in the hands of the Jewish community, then it's the end."

That prompted Jewish community leader Amos Luzzatto to comment: "From bad to worse – what is worse than Di Canio's original gesture is the implication of his comment, namely that the Jewish community has occult powers."

Di Canio continued to protest that people were reading too much into his gesture (and his words) but, in the end, perhaps influenced by the fact that FIFA had decided to look into his behaviour, he took a step back and promised he would not do it again: "I put the overall good of Lazio in front of everything, and for that reason I will avoid making that which for some, but not for me, is a diabolical gesture."

We'll see.

'I will avoid making that which for some, but not for me, is a diabolical gesture'

Di Canio promises not to repeat his Fascist salute

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Teething troubles

The World Cup organising committee have had to deal with structural faults at the host stadiums and concerns about security and ticketing

NICK BIDWELL in Frankfurt

WORLD CUP organising committee president Franz Beckenbauer and his team are in a no-win situation. If they deliver a well-run tournament this summer, the Germans will merely be living up to their stereotype as a people driven by attention to detail and order. If they fail to iron out the glitches, the headline writers will gleefully suggest that Teutonic efficiency is a myth.

There was certainly more than a hint of *schadenfreude* outside the federal republic when it became clear that a number of the World Cup venues had structural deficiencies – leaks in the sliding roof at the rebuilt Waldstadion in Frankfurt, cracks in the roof at Kaiserslautern, the worrying vibrations experienced by fans as they jumped up and down in a stand at Nurnberg, necessitating the installation of special shock absorbers. Although the problems were quickly solved and all 12 venues were given a clean bill of health following extensive site inspections, the tales of imperfect workmanship were the last thing the Germans wanted, especially when they had been proclaiming long and loud about having the most advanced stadia in the world.

In many respects that is true, though. Over the past few years they have remodelled or created a dozen magnificent grounds, each registering high marks for spectator comfort, food and drink facilities, accessibility, high-tech turnstiles and information features, and the quality of the pitch. The latter is a particularly high priority. The Germans took a lot of criticism for the state of the turf when they last hosted the World Cup in 1974. This time round, frequent

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workshops for stadia officials and groundsmen have been held to ensure there would be no repeat. Despite the presence of retractable roofs and towering stands that restrict the flow of air to the pitch, the organisers are convinced their playing surfaces will wear well and bounce true.

The Germans have also been forced on to the defensive about the issue of security following some disturbing incidents in recent months. Hamburg player Alexander Laas was felled by a missile thrown by visiting Koln fans, German and Polish hooligans met up for a pre-arranged scrap in a wood in the east of the country, and there were several outbreaks of homegrown fisticuffs. All this made it inevitable that searching questions would be asked of the nation's ability to keep the spectator peace next summer.

Events in Hamburg, from where the picture of man-mountain Belgian defender Daniel Van Buyten carrying the bloodied and dazed Laas off the pitch spoke a thousand words, resulted in the decision to put up safety nets behind the goals at all World Cup venues.

But mindful of being cast as kill-joys, the organisers are loath to be too heavy-handed within and outside their stadia. "The Dutch, for example, bring a whole orchestra to games. If we cracked down on that sort of thing, we would then be criticised for taking out the fun element," said Wolfgang Niersbach, organising committee vice-president in charge of public relations.

Storm warning… bloodied Alexander Laas is carried off by Hamburg team-mate Daniel Van Buyten after being hit by a missile thrown by Koln fans

Zero tolerance

In contrast, certain German politicians are apparently all for wielding the big stick. Former Interior Minister Otto Schily had pledged a zero-tolerance attitude towards any miscreants, while Wolfgang Schauble – who replaced Schily when a new coalition government was formed in the autumn – wants the army on the streets.

"Like the USA and Great Britain, Germany is a target for international terrorism," Schauble said. "During the World Cup our federal and state police forces will be very stretched. Why shouldn't we relieve the police by transferring temporarily some of their work to the armed forces?"

Konrad Freiberg, head of the German police union, seemed to echo Schauble's fears, claiming that while the stadia and their environs would be more than adequately patrolled, there were simply not enough officers to cover the city centres and the big-screen sites, where a mixture of ticketless fans, alcohol and misplaced nationalism could make for a nasty brew.

However, there is a potential sticking point – the German constitution stipulates the armed forces can be used only for defence matters or to counter a threat to the democracy of the federal republic. Both houses of parliament would have to consent to the use of squaddies to guard team hotels, airports and railway stations, and politicians are deeply divided on the issue.

Even though the army might not fall in, World Cup security chief Helmut Spahn is still confident he has the tools to keep the thugs at arm's length. He points to hooligan banning orders, the close co-operation between the German police authorities and their foreign counterparts, the state-of-the-art video surveillance equipment at every stadium, the checkpoints where fans will be searched and a corps of well-trained team stewards.

For the Germans, a large part of their anti-hooliganism strategy lies in creating a friendly atmosphere, to emphatically roll out the welcome mat to visiting supporters. To this end, *Fan Projekten* (coalitions of German supporter groups and local authority-funded youth organisations) have collaborated with the organising committee and security experts to produce a five-part orientation set-up, which includes permanent and mobile fan embassies, free multilingual city guides, a website and 24-hour telephone helpline.

Ticketing, of course, is always the most controversial of World Cup subjects. Some of the moans and groans have been utterly predictable – individual nations are allocated only eight per cent of the ground capacity for group games, while a third of the total 3.2 million tickets are set aside for sponsors and corporate hospitality.

But there have been other gripes too. The decision to allow payment only by MasterCard was, in the eyes of many, a breach of European anti-monopoly rules. Meanwhile, Beckenbauer and co have twice been embarrassed by the content of their ticket sales fine print. First, complaints from the German Consumer Protection Association led to the deletion of a paragraph that stated fans had to allow their personal details to be passed on to third parties for advertising purposes. Then protests from MEPs forced the organisers to back-track on a refusal to refund the five euro fee to fans who had unsuccessfully applied for returned tickets.

In a bid to thwart the black market and, particularly, internet auction site Ebay, the organisers insist anyone trying to enter a ground with a personalised ticket that is not in his/her own name will not get in. That remains to be seen. Will there be enough time for mandatory ID checks? The doubters include none other than FIFA president Sepp Blatter. "We still haven't found the optimal solution," he said. "If everyone has to show their papers it will take four hours before all the spectators are in the stadium. They [the Germans] are a little too much the perfectionists."

Called to the cause…new boss Mirko Slomka

Schalke demonstrated their trigger-happy tendencies once again when firing Ralf Rangnick and replacing him with assistant Mirko Slomka. Only last May Rangnick was everybody's darling, having guided the club to second place in the Bundesliga and into the Champions League in his first season in charge. But Schalke never got into their stride this term, finishing only third in their group in Europe, lying 11 points behind League leaders Bayern Munich at the winter break, and suffering a 6-0 thrashing by Eintracht Frankfurt in the Cup.

'Why shouldn't we relieve the police by transferring some of their work to the armed forces?'

Interior Minister Wolfgang Schauble argues for squaddies on the streets during the World Cup

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Star chaser…Ivory Coast forward Didier Drogba (right) closes in on goal during a qualifier against Egypt. The two sides clash again in the Nations Cup group stage

Power games

Africa's five World Cup qualifiers will be tested to the limit at the 25th Cup of Nations, says Mark Gleeson, who profiles six potential young stars and the 16 teams group by group over the following 10 pages

THE AFRICAN NATIONS CUP finals in Egypt could well prove to have the most competitive field in the tournament's history, and should provide a serious test of the credentials of the continent's surprise World Cup finalists.

All five countries going to Germany in the summer – Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Angola and Tunisia – will be in Egypt for an invaluable chance to play in a competitive environment less than five months before the World Cup kicks off.

Tunisia, the current African champions, were the only one of the five not to upset the form book by finishing top of their group in the World Cup qualifiers, which for the first time doubled up as Nations Cup preliminaries (the top three from each group entered the continental finals). In Egypt we will get some insight into whether the achievements of the other four, all World Cup debutants, represent a shift in the balance of power in Africa or a mere blip.

Angola and Togo have been drawn in the same group at the Nations Cup, alongside Cameroon, one of the continent's dominant powers for many years but who were pipped for a World Cup place by Ivory Coast and will presumably be primed to show why they should have gone instead.

The Ivorians, who have a star-studded side led by Chelsea's Didier Drogba, are also in a tough group, facing the hosts, who finished third behind Ivory Coast and Cameroon in the qualifiers, and Morocco. Ivory Coast looked a polished side right up until the penultimate round of the qualifiers, when they buckled under intense pressure. Indeed, they managed to qualify for Germany only because Cameroon blew their chance by missing a last-gasp penalty in their final game against Egypt, a 1-1 draw.

Ghana have been handed what may be the toughest test of all by being pooled with Nigeria and Senegal, two of the other supposed superpowers suffering the ignominy of failing to reach the World Cup.

Added to this already combustible mix is Tunisia's desire to retain the title and Egypt's desire

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to triumph on home soil, while the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, South Africa and Zambia have the potential to cause upsets.

The Nations Cup is always the biggest sporting event in Africa, and the added edge this time virtually guarantees that the tournament will provide riveting viewing. The finals generate an enthusiasm and interest that temporarily unites the disparate races and tribes of a continent passionate about the game.

The quality of the players is advancing with each tournament, largely because many more Africans are now with European clubs, while Africa itself has benefited from the import of international coaching expertise.

Role models

More and more role models and heroes are being delivered to African youth. Samuel Eto'o, Michael Essien, Emmanuel Adebayor, Marouane Chamakh and Drogba bring a pride to the African game and a sense of entitlement to all its people.

The next step is to harness the individual talent into cohesive teams, since that is what will produce better results for Africa on the world stage.

But Africa's failure to produce a World Cup semi-finalist, let alone a winner, is not just down to on-field issues. Most of the continent's national teams are still hampered by poor leadership within their respective federations. Good administrators are still relatively rare in African football since the positions attract those with political and publicity-seeking agendas who aim to use the game for power, prestige and personal financial gain.

The long-standing reign of Issa Hayatou as Confederation of African Football president has done little to improve the state of the game in the continent and has left the governing body looking tired and introspective.

In an era of mass commercialisation and at a time when football worldwide is flying on the wings of corporate sponsorship, CAF does not even have a marketing department. Its commercial dealings are all done in an old-fashioned cloak-and-dagger style that suggests closer scrutiny is both unwelcome and unhealthy.

CAF's limited sponsorship deals are arranged through French company Sport Five, which has a monopoly over the marketing and TV rights to all Africa's top footballing properties, such as the Nations Cup and the Champions League. Sport Five pays CAF a pittance for the rights and then does the bare minimum in terms of TV coverage and marketing of the events.

As a result, the passion and drama of the Nations Cup, for instance, is often lost because of technical glitches and poor direction of TV coverage.

It could be a much-sought-after tournament for broadcasters worldwide if a little effort went into making it look better. But Sport Five do not need to care, because they have won back the rights without a transparent tendering process each time the previous deal expired.

African football could be making 10 times as much money as it does now with a more dynamic approach but the CAF leadership is too scared to rock the boat lest they upset their constituency and lose their positions of privilege and power.

They remain unwilling to punish administrative inefficiency, gamesmanship and the general unsporting approach that African countries have towards their footballing guests. They also refuse to tackle a crisis of confidence about refereeing that has left few with any faith in officials' impartiality.

As a result the image of the African game is clouded, in contrast to the game overseen by FIFA and UEFA, who have proven that a proactive attitude builds a positive perception that has sponsors rushing to sign up and the coffers continually filling.

Hayatou's iron rule

Patronage is what has kept Hayatou in power since 1988 and he rules with an iron grip, being consulted on every decision. His staff are afraid to move without his say-so.

The president of every CAF-affiliated national association has a position on the myriad standing committees that purport to serve the African game. Most are happy to return Hayatou to power every four years in return for occasional business-class travel, a few days' expenses paid in cash (US dollars) and the supposed prestige of serving on a CAF committee.

Occasionally, a few brave (some would say foolhardy) individuals emerge with the vigour to seek change and institute bright ideas, but they are quickly beaten back into line and eventually disappear with their spirits broken.

African football will continue to inch forward rather than leap ahead to its full potential for as long as the power remains controlled by an old autocratic francophone political class.

These dinosaurs are stifling a sport with the potential to explode up to new levels of excellence, if only the players were given the proper platforms to show their potential. Hopefully one day we will have a better tale to tell.

Spectacular…a fireworks display is staged alongside the Pyramids at Giza during the finals draw, held nearby

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Match schedule

Group A

Jan 20	Egypt v Libya	Cairo (CS)
Jan 21	Morocco v Ivory Coast	Cairo (CS)
Jan 24	Libya v Ivory Coast	Cairo (CS)
Jan 24	Egypt v Morocco	Cairo (CS)
Jan 28	Egypt v Ivory Coast	Cairo (CS)
Jan 28	Libya v Morocco	Cairo (MS)

Group B

Jan 21	Cameroon v Angola	Cairo (MS)
Jan 21	Togo v DR Congo	Cairo (MS)
Jan 25	Angola v DR Congo	Cairo (MS)
Jan 25	Cameroon v Togo	Cairo (MS)
Jan 29	Angola v Togo	Cairo (CS)
Jan 29	Cameroon v DR Congo	Cairo (MS)

Group C

Jan 22	Tunisia v Zambia	Alexandria (BGS)
Jan 22	South Africa v Guinea	Alexandria (BGS)
Jan 26	Zambia v Guinea	Alexandria (BGS)
Jan 26	Tunisia v South Africa	Alexandria (BGS)
Jan 30	Tunisia v Guinea	Alexandria (BGS)
Jan 30	Zambia v South Africa	Alexandria (AS)

Group D

Jan 23	Nigeria v Ghana	Port Said
Jan 23	Zimbabwe v Senegal	Port Said
Jan 27	Ghana v Senegal	Port Said
Jan 27	Nigeria v Zimbabwe	Port Said
Jan 31	Nigeria v Senegal	Port Said
Jan 31	Ghana v Zimbabwe	Ismailia

Quarter-finals

Feb 3	Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd (QF1)	Alexandria (BGS)
Feb 3	Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd (QF2)	Cairo (CS)
Feb 4	Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd (QF3)	Port Said
Feb 4	Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd (QF4)	Cairo (MS)

Semi-finals

Feb 7	QF2 winners v QF1 winners	Cairo (CS)
Feb 7	QF4 winners v QF3 winners	Alexandria (BGS)

Third-place play-off

Feb 9	Cairo (MS)

Final

Feb 10	Cairo (CS)

CS = Cairo Stadium
MS = Military Stadium
BGS = Border Guards Stadium
AS = Alexandria Stadium

Future African stars

Some of the players likely to be much better known at the end of the tournament

Off the ASEC production line…Boka

1 Arthur Boka
(Ivory Coast)

THERE WILL BE at least half a dozen graduates of ASEC Abidjan's famed academy in action at the Nations Cup finals, and while Arthur Boka might not be the best known, he is one of the most successful products. Last season, the 22-year-old left-back won the French League Cup with Strasbourg, whom he joined after two years at Belgium's Beveren, the staging post for most of the Ivorian exports from the academy created by Frenchman Jean-Marc Guillou. Boka has also secured a regular place in the Ivory Coast side over the past two years as they qualified for the World Cup for the first time and the Nations Cup.

The youngster may be a defender, but his game is mostly about attack and creativity, and his blistering runs down the flank offer a fruitful supply line for main Ivory Coast forward Didier Drogba.

Boka spent six years at the ASEC academy after walking off the street for a trial. The move to Belgian football proved difficult, not helped by the fact that Beveren's policy of bringing in a large number of African players has not gone down well in the country. There was a far easier assimilation at Strasbourg, and now the youngster has the chance to show he is equally at home on the continental stage.

2 Emad Moteab
(Egypt)

EGYPT STRIKERS HAVE a reputation for being temperamental, with Hossam Hassan and Ahmed "Mido" Hossam the two most recent examples. Emad Moteab is the latest addition to the Pharaohs' "crazy gang", but while the 22-year-old has often got on the wrong side of referees and coaches, he is at least starting to learn the value of harnessing his aggression and converting it into goals. Moteab hit six as his club, Al Ahly, won last year's Champions League and 15 more in the domestic championship, which Al Ahly won by a remarkable 31 points.

The performance has put the youngster in with a chance of partnering Hossam in the Egypt attack at the Nations Cup, although there is stiff competition from Amr Zaki and Abdelhalim Ali.

Moteab already has an international pedigree having represented Egypt at the 2003 World Youth Cup, when he scored a wonder goal against England. Even if he doesn't get the chance to make his mark with the seniors this time round, it is probably only a matter of time before he does.

Aggression and goals…Moteab

3 Jean Makoun
(Cameroon)

Attack breaker…Makoun

IT WILL COME as no surprise if Cameroonian midfielder Jean Makoun moves from Lille to one of Europe's more fashionable clubs. Interest has been high in a player consistently ranked among the best in the French League this season and whose talent was in evidence in the Champions League, even though Lille did not make the knockout stages.

The 22-year-old is likely to bring Lille a handsome return for their persistence. They signed the Yaounde-born midfielder after spotting him at the African Under-17 championship but he did not have the necessary work permit and Lille had to wait a year before they could put him through his paces. Even then, he was groomed in their reserves, so did not make his League debut until the 2002-03 season.

Cameroon see Makoun as a successor to Marc-Vivien Foe, using him to break down opposition attacks before they test the ageing defence. Makoun has taken to the role with relish, and has shown an added dimension to his game this season, scoring four goals for Lille.

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Wizard out wide…Gilberto

4 Gilberto
(Angola)

THE BLINDING PACE and close control of winger Gilberto make him one of African football's most watchable players, and he played a major role in Angola's surprise World Cup qualification.

Gilberto was just 16 when winning his first cap, as a late substitute, in their last match of the 2000 Nations Cup qualifying campaign. But Angola's failure to reach the finals meant he was destined to gain a higher profile in club football. The spindly-legged wide man was a member of the Petro Atletico side that surprisingly reached the 2001 African Champions League semi-finals, inflicting a first home defeat in continental competition on Cairo giants Al Ahly on the way.

Gilberto's performance in that tie prompted Al Ahly coach Manuel Jose to sign him, and the winger, now 23, was a key player in the club's march to last year's Champions League title.

Although Gilberto had enjoyed little success with the senior national team until last year, he was part of the Under-20 side that won the 2000 African championship. He is one of several players to have graduated from that team to provide key elements in the squad bound for both Egypt and the World Cup.

5 Stephen Makinwa
(Nigeria)

ITALY HAS BECOME a popular destination for talented Nigerian teenagers in recent years, and while many have not made the grade, there are a surprising number who have. Obafemi Martins, Christian Obodo and Victor Obinna all see regular Serie A action, and another, Stephen Makinwa, sparked a transfer scramble last summer after Atalanta's relegation.

Internazionale led the race for the forward's signature but were pipped by a more attractive offer (£5million) from Palermo, and Makinwa, 22, has been strutting his stuff back in Serie A as well as in the UEFA Cup this term.

Makinwa has been round the block since arriving in Italy five years ago, playing for Reggiana, Como, Modena and Genoa before joining Atalanta. He had the good fortune to play at Ebedei FC, the junior club in Lagos run by Churchill Oliseh, a brother of former Juventus midfielder and Nigeria captain Sunday Oliseh. This facilitated his move to Italy and it has been a steady progression up the ranks, culminating in the move to Sicily.

Makinwa is a good friend of Martins, who is at Internazionale, and that helps their attacking partnership for Nigeria. Now the Palermo man will be hoping some of Martins' scoring magic rubs off on him ahead of the Nations Cup – Makinwa still has only one goal for Nigeria, scored on his debut against South Africa 14 months ago.

Strutting in Sicily…Makinwa

Germany-bound…Amoah

6 Matthew Amoah
(Ghana)

THE EGYPT FINALS offer Ghana forward Matthew Amoah a second bite of the cherry after he failed to make an impact four years ago when a surprise inclusion in the squad for the Mali tournament. Amoah's lack of success there meant he was banished to the international wilderness, and he received a recall only recently when Ghana were going through a goal drought in the World Cup/Nations Cup qualifiers.

The 25-year-old caught the eye again this time round after hitting form for Dutch side Vitesse Arnhem, but it was still something of a gamble for new Ghana coach Ratomir Dujkovic. However, Amoah repaid the Serb's decision handsomely, scoring in each of his country's last three qualifiers to help book their first visit to the World Cup and a place at the Nations Cup.

Amoah's nine goals for Vitesse in the autumn prompted Borussia Dortmund to sign him in the January transfer window, allowing him to acclimatise to Germany ahead of this summer's finals. And he can make his place on the world stage all the more certain by doing in Egypt what he failed to do in Mali – getting on the Nations Cup scoresheet.

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Group A

EGYPT

On a roll…free-scoring Zaki evades his markers during a qualifier against Sudan

Nickname
Pharaohs.

Nations Cup finals appearances
20 (the record).

Best Nations Cup performance
Winners four times: the first two editions – 1957 and 1959 – 1986 at home and 1998 in Burkina Faso.

Status in African football
Former giants who have now lost their all-conquering reputation.

How they qualified
As hosts, although they would have made it anyway after finishing third behind Ivory Coast and Cameroon in their World Cup/Nations Cup qualifying group.

Head lad…Hossam is the main striker

Coach

Hassan Shehata is a former international and played at three Nations Cup finals. But the 56-year-old is a relative newcomer as a coach at this level.

Key men
Ahmed "Mido" Hossam is the bad boy of Egyptian football but also the national team's attacking king pin. The 23-year-old comes into the tournament on the back of vastly improved form at club side Tottenham.
Mohamed Barakat is frequently described as the best African footballer still playing on the continent. He led his club, Al Ahly, to an easy win against Etoile Sahel of Tunisia in the recent African Champions League Final.
Essam El-Hadary is Egypt's undisputed first-choice goalkeeper having given some outstanding performances in recent years. A team-mate of Barakat at Al Ahly.

Player to watch
Amr Zaki has been in free-scoring mood for Egypt over the past 12 months, hitting 11 goals in 10 games, to earn a regular starting berth.

Prediction
The burden of expectation might prove too much for the hosts, who are often nervous under pressure.

IVORY COAST

One for the album…the 1992 squad show off the Nations Cup trophy

Nickname
Elephants.

Nations Cup finals appearances
16.

Best Nations Cup performance
Winners in 1992, when they beat Ghana 11-10 on penalties in the Final after a 0-0 draw.

Status in African football
New kings of the jungle.

How they qualified
By finishing top of their group, ahead of Cameroon and Egypt, to also claim a berth at the World Cup.

Giant presence…Drogba

Coach
Dour Frenchman **Henri Michel** has no love for the Nations Cup having been fired by Morocco after the 2000 edition and by Tunisia after the 2002 tournament, just months before he was due to take the team to the World Cup in Korea/Japan.

Key men
Didier Drogba is one of the new giants of the continent's footballing scene and a candidate for the 2005 African Footballer of the Year award on the back of his form for both club, Chelsea, and country.
Saint-Etienne's **Didier Zokora** is a highly-rated hard man. The 25-year-old has been linked with a bevy of big European clubs in recent months.
Aruna Dindane forms a fearsome partnership with Drogba. The Lens forward is the primary supplier to the tall Chelsea striker.

Player to watch

Arouna Kone has been a star of the Belgian and Dutch leagues in recent seasons; the 22-year-old is now due to explode on to a much bigger stage.

Prediction
Ivory Coast have the striking ammunition to win the tournament but may have to settle for reaching the semi-finals.

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LIBYA

Home pride…Libya hosted the 1982 tournament and reached the Final

Nickname
None.

Nations Cup finals appearances
2.

Best Nations Cup performance
Reached the 1982 Final, losing to Ghana in a penalty shoot-out, on their only previous finals appearance, when they hosted the tournament.

Status in African football
Eccentric unknowns.

How they qualified
Luckily. They finished fourth in their group and only the top three were meant to go through, but got a finals place because hosts Egypt finished third, in one of the automatic spots.

Trump card…El-Taib

Coach
Croat **Ilija Loncarevic** returned to the national team post last April just nine months after being fired.

Key men
The pace and goalscoring acumen of **Tarek El-Taib** were key to Libya's qualification, and the 28-year-old will be the team's trump card at the finals.
Midfielder **Jehad Muntasser** is now on the books of Serie A side Treviso having failed to make the grade at Arsenal. Muntasser, now 27, spent the 1997-98 season at Highbury without getting any first-team action.
Goalkeeper **Luis De Agustini** is originally from Uruguay and has since returned to his homeland to play for Liverpool of Montevideo. But he is still committed to playing for the north Africans, who gave him a passport after a season at Al Ittihad, Tripoli's top club.

Player to watch
Nader Kara scored three goals in as many games in the qualifiers. He plays his club football in Qatar.

Prediction
They will get a whipping.

MOROCCO

Pipped at the post…Morocco just missed out on the World Cup after drawing in Tunisia

Nickname
Atlas Lions.

Nations Cup finals appearances
12.

Best Nations Cup performance
Won the 1976 tournament, when for the only time the group winners and runners-up entered a play-off round-robin to decide the champions.

Status in African football
Regular contenders at major finals but without the killer punch.

How they qualified
By finishing second in their group, behind Tunisia. Morocco were unbeaten and missed out on the World Cup by just a point, failing to make it after being held to a 2-2 draw away to Tunisia in their final game.

Set-piece specialist…Safri

Coach
Mohamed Fakhir was the hasty choice to replace Frenchman Philippe Troussier, whose reign lasted less than two months.

Key men
Talal El-Karkouri is primarily picked for his defensive experience, but the Charlton player likes to push forward and gets goals too.
Feyenoord striker **Ali Boussaboun** is a former Dutch youth international but switched allegiance to play for the country of his birth.
Midfielder **Youssef Safri** is Morocco's set-piece specialist. The 28-year-old has just signed a new contract at Norwich.

Player to watch
Marouane Chamakh is one of African football's potential superstars, and made his mark at the Nations Cup two years ago when scoring twice at the age of just 20.

Prediction
The recent coaching turmoil could make getting out of the tough group a tricky task indeed.

Group A

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Group B

ANGOLA

Watching brief…ex-youth team coach Goncalves (left) has found success with the seniors

Nickname
Palancas Negras (the name of a black-faced antelope found only in Angola).

Nations Cup finals appearances
3.

Best Nations Cup performance
Never been past the first phase and have yet to win a game at the finals. Their best result to date was a 3-3 draw against Cameroon in 1996.

Status in African football
Surprise package after pipping Nigeria to a World Cup place.

How they qualified
By finishing top of their group.

Most caps, most goals…Akwa

Coach
The little-known **Luis Oliveira Goncalves** came up through the ranks coaching Angola's junior sides before leading the seniors to their first World Cup.

Key men
Captain **Akwa** is the team's father figure despite being only 28. No one has scored more goals (31) or played more matches (68) in Angola's colours.
Varzim's **Figueiredo** is a late bloomer in international football. The 33-year-old is a key man in midfield and Angola's set-piece specialist.
Flavio is a more than useful attacking option, with the ability to sneak vital goals.

Player to watch

Benfica striker **Mantorras** has disappeared off the radar in recent times because of a persistent knee injury, but he could well burst back into the limelight at the Nations Cup.

Prediction
Angola's World Cup qualification hangover could hamper their progress and they will struggle to get past the first round.

CAMEROON

Ours again…Cameroon win the trophy for the fourth time in 2002

Nickname
Indomitable Lions.

Nations Cup finals appearances
14.

Best Nations Cup performance
Winners four times – in 1984, 1988, 2000 and 2002.

Status in African football
A superpower with a bruised ego after missing out on the World Cup.

How they qualified
By finishing second in their group behind Ivory Coast. Pipped for top spot after only drawing at home to Egypt in their final qualifier having missed a last-gasp penalty.

Milestone…Song

Coach
Portuguese **Artur Jorge** is a newcomer to the African circuit but certainly not short on international experience having worked in France, Holland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and Saudi Arabia, as well as his homeland.

Key men
Samuel Eto'o is a consummate goalscorer with a massive international profile, although many in Cameroon believe the 24-year-old is not as dedicated to their cause as he is to that of his club, Barcelona.
The storming right-wing runs of Chelsea's **Geremi Njitap** are a big part of Cameroon's game plan.
Captain **Rigobert Song** will win his 100th cap in Cameroon's opening game at the Nations Cup to become the first black African to reach the milestone.

Player to watch

Achille Webo is the new strike partner for Eto'o and overshadowed the Barcelona star last year, hitting six goals for Cameroon in the qualifying campaign.

Prediction
Beware the wounded Lions! Cameroon are going to come strong and will go all the way to the Final.

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DR CONGO

Magic moment…Mputu gets past his marker in a November friendly against Tunisia

Nickname
Simbas. Once known as the Leopards but have since changed their spots.

Nations Cup finals appearances
15.

Best Nations Cup performance
Won the tournament in 1968 and 1974 but those days are long gone.

Status in African football
Consistent qualifiers but not a serious threat beyond the quarter-finals.

How they qualified
By finishing runners-up to Ghana in their group, to make it an eighth successive Nations Cup appearance.

Positive outlook…Lua Lua

Coach

Frenchman **Claude Le Roy** won the Nations Cup with Cameroon in 1988, but Senegal flopped with him in charge when they hosted the 1992 tournament.

Key men
Cyrille Mubiala is likely to be the tallest player at the finals giving him an aerial advantage in the heart of the Simbas' defence. The 31-year-old has also proven himself a big attacking threat at set-pieces.
Defender **Herita Ilunga** goes into the Nations Cup on the back of some fine form for club side Saint-Etienne.
Tresor Mputu has been in talks over a possible move to Lokeren in Belgium, but there might be many more suitors for the midfield magician after the Nations Cup.

Player to watch
Lomana Lua Lua had a disastrous Nations Cup in 2004, getting himself sent off in the second game and picking up a four-match ban. So the 25-year-old striker should be well motivated to make a positive impact in Egypt.

Prediction
They can expect a tough battle to make it out of the group, but a quarter-finals place is within their capabilities.

TOGO

Stop right there…Cameroon's Lauren is halted during Togo's group win in 2000

Nickname
Les Eperviers (Sparrow Hawks).

Nations Cup finals appearances
6.

Best Nations Cup performance
The Togolese have never made it past the first round but did beat eventual winners Cameroon in a group game in 2000.

Status in African football
Their quality is in question, despite having just made it to their first World Cup qualifiers.

How they qualified
By securing top place in their group, after a nine-match unbeaten run, to also book a trip to Germany.

Vital goals…Coubadja

Coach
Nigerian **Stephen Keshi** has proven the talisman for Togo despite his coaching inexperience. The 43-year-old played in a record-equalling three Finals at the Nations Cup, winning one of them, the 1994 edition, when he was captain.

Key men
Emmanuel Adebayor was top scorer in the qualifiers with 10 goals and did more than most to ensure his country's remarkable rise to prominence.
Mohamed Kader Coubadja was the toast of Togo after scoring twice in the 3-2 win away to Congo that secured top spot in the qualifying group and a first World Cup finals place. The 30-year-old plays for Sochaux in France.
Teenage defender **Emmanuel Mathias** made a strong impression in the recent African Champions League campaign with Tunisian club Esperance.

Player to watch

France-born **Alaixys Romao** was unearthed by Togo in August and is a welcome addition to a threadbare midfield.

Prediction
Togo will be hard-pressed to keep up their new-found reputation as winners.

Group B

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Group C

GUINEA

Bite point…Balde is a vital part of the defence

Nickname
Syli Nationale.

Nations Cup finals appearances
8.

Best Nations Cup performance
Runners-up to Morocco in 1976, the year the tournament's final round was played on a round-robin basis.

Status in African football
Viewed as dangerous opponents but are traditionally weak when playing away from home.

How they qualified
By finishing a distant third in their group behind Tunisia and Morocco.

Impressive in Europe…Camara

Coach
Frenchman **Patrick Neveu** is a journeyman with previous coaching experience in China, Niger, Morocco and Tunisia.

Key men
Pascal Feindouno gave up the captain's armband in protest at the poor organisation surrounding the team but is still a committed member of the side.
Popular Celtic defender **Bobo Balde** provides the bite and stability at the back.
Former Arsenal player **Kaba Diawara** makes his Nations Cup debut at the age of 30 having made a switch in international allegiance. The forward played for France at junior level.

Player to watch
Defender **Ibrahima Camara** has seen limited Serie A action with Parma but impressed in last season's UEFA Cup and could well catch the eye on the Nations Cup stage.

Prediction
Worth backing for a spot in the quarter-finals.

SOUTH AFRICA

Glory day…the 1996 squad celebrate their Nations Cup triumph on home soil

Nickname
Bafana Bafana.

Nations Cup finals appearances
6.

Best Nations Cup performance
Won the tournament at their first attempt in 1996, when they were also hosts.

Status in African football
Have lost a lot of their prestige because of a series of mediocre performances over the past three years.

How they qualified
Sneaked into third place in their group behind Ghana and DR Congo, having been three points clear at the top with three games to go, two of them at home.

Class apart…McCarthy

Coach
Ted Dumitru has been installed as caretaker after the resignation of Stuart Baxter and has moved quickly to shake up the look of the side.

Key men
Benni McCarthy is often derided for a lack of commitment to South Africa's cause but he remains the team's one international-class striker.
Elrio Van Heerden is headed to Club Brugge from FC Copenhagen and he should show at the Nations Cup why he is likely to remain hot property in the future.
New captain **Sibusiso Zuma** is blooming late in his career. The 31-year-old had a brilliant autumn campaign with Bundesliga side Arminia Bielefeld.

Player to watch
Midfielder **Benedict Vilakazi** is thought by many to be too small to play for a top European club, but his creativity, tenacity and workrate make him vital to South Africa's chances of progress.

Prediction
Could surprise the critics and find some much-needed confidence ahead of the 2010 World Cup, which South Africa will host.

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TUNISIA

Holders…Tunisia carry off the trophy as hosts last time round

Nickname
Carthage Eagles.

Nations Cup finals appearances
12.

Best Nations Cup performance
Finally won the tournament in 2004, on home soil, in their third appearance in the Final and having staged the event for the third time.

Status in African football
Reigning continental champions but few believe they would have been No 1 two years ago without home advantage.

How they qualified
By finishing top of their group, holding off Morocco's challenge.

Rock at the back…Jaidi

Coach

Roger Lemerre is the only man to have won both the European Championship and African Nations Cup as coach. The 64-year-old has now led Tunisia to the World Cup finals, too.

Key men
Giant defender **Radhi Jaidi** has had his quixotic moments at Bolton but he is invariably the national team's defensive rock.
Brazil-born **Francileudo dos Santos** got the key goals for Tunisia at the last Nations Cup as they won the trophy on home soil.
Midfielder **Kaies Ghodhbane**, who has just turned 30, will be participating in his sixth Nations Cup finals but continues to provide a high workrate in midfield.

Player to watch
Haikel Gmamdia is the new attacking sensation for Tunisia, who suddenly have an embarrassment of riches in the striking department.

Prediction
They will lose in the quarter-finals.

ZAMBIA

Attacking drive…Katongo (centre) battles for possession against Mali in the qualifiers

Nickname
Chipolopolo (originally the supporters' nickname but now hijacked by the team).

Nations Cup finals appearances
12.

Best Nations Cup performance
Reached the Final in 1974 and in dramatic fashion 20 years later, less than 12 months after almost their entire side had been wiped out in a plane crash.

Status in African football
Always highly regarded but have never been able to go beyond that to become a continental superpower.

Looking for goals…Mbesuma

How they qualified
By finishing third in their group behind Togo and Senegal, but were in contention for top spot until the penultimate round of qualifiers.

Coach

At 42, **Kalusha Bwalya** represents a new generation of former internationals now using their experience of European football to the betterment of African soccer.

Key men
Collins Mbesuma has had a miserable six months at Portsmouth and will be seeking to restore his goalscoring reputation at the finals.
Elijah Tana is the defensive stalwart of the side and also likely to wear the captain's armband.
Left-sided **Chris Katongo** is an integral part of Zambia's attacking plan since they like to spread the ball out wide.

Player to watch
Eighteen-year-old winger **Clifford Mulenga** has bags of confidence and is set to make a major impact on the African soccer scene.

Prediction
It's a tough ask for Zambia to get past the group stage.

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Group D

GHANA

To the fore…Edusei gets in front of South Africa's Steven Pienaar during the qualifiers

Nickname
Black Stars.

Nations Cup finals appearances
14.

Best Nations Cup performance
Winners four times – the first country to achieve the feat – in 1963, 1965, 1978 and 1982.

Status in African football
Back up among the leading lights after two decades of mediocrity.

How they qualified
By winning their group ahead of DR Congo and South Africa after coming from behind. Top spot also booked them a first World Cup spot.

Top feeling…striker Asamoah Gyan celebrates qualification

Coach
Unheralded Serb **Ratomir Dujkovic** took tiny Rwanda to the last Nations Cup and will now take Ghana to their first World Cup finals.

Key men
Stephen Appiah, the captain, now has added responsibilities following late injuries to Michael Essien and Sulley Muntari.
Matthew Amoah scored vital goals in the qualifiers having been brought out of the international wilderness by coach Dujkovic.
Daniel Edusei was a teenage prodigy who now has some useful experience after eight years in the Greek League.

Player to watch
Joetex Frimpong has been top scorer in the last two African Champions League campaigns for Nigerian club Enyimba and is set to join Bayer Leverkusen after the Nations Cup.

Prediction
Could well be edged out of a top-two finish in the group by Senegal and Nigeria.

NIGERIA

Young blood…Mikel fends off Argentina's Fernando Gago at last year's World Youth Cup

Nickname
Super Eagles.

Nations Cup finals appearances
14.

Best Nations Cup performance
Twice winners – on home soil in 1980 and much more convincingly in 1994 in Tunisia, with a quality they have found hard to emulate.

Status in African football
Superpower who don't dominate in the way they should.

How they qualified
By finishing second in their group. They tied on points with Angola but lost out on a World Cup place on head-to-head record.

Finals farewell?…Okocha

Coach
Augustine Eguavoen can emulate Egyptian Mahmoud Al-Gohari in winning the Nations Cup as both a player and coach having been in the Nigeria side that won the trophy in 1994.

Key men
Obafemi Martins could be the next big African superstar and gets the chance to take a major step in that direction in his first Nations Cup finals appearance, at the age of 21. In contrast, the Egypt finals are likely to be the swansong for 32-year-old **Jay-Jay Okocha**. The midfielder was voted best player of the 2004 finals in Tunisia and scored four goals. **Joseph Yobo** is the leader of the defence and will be looking to improve on a mediocre autumn with struggling club side Everton.

Player to watch
John Obi Mikel, 18, has won just a single senior cap but had Alex Ferguson and Jose Mourinho fighting over his signature.

Prediction
To play Cameroon in the Final.

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SENEGAL

Letting fly…Diop shoots during the 2002 Final against Cameroon

Nickname
Lions of Teranga.

Nations Cup finals appearances
10.

Best Nations Cup performance
Runners-up in 2002 to Cameroon, losing only on penalties after a 0-0 draw.

Status in African football
Overnight sensations after their exploits at the 2002 World Cup but reality has set in since.

How they qualified
Embarrassingly beaten into second place in their group by lowly Togo, thus missing out on a trip to Germany in June.

Mixed reception…Diouf

Coach
Abdoulaye Sarr was appointed in place of sacked Frenchman Guy Stephan in June but is not expected to stay on after the Nations Cup.

Key men
El Hadji Diouf is one of world football's *enfant terribles* but viewed as a charismatic figure by Senegal fans.
The driving play from midfield of **Papa Bouba Diop** will be a key element of Senegal's game plan at the Nations Cup
Henri Camara has been in great goalscoring form at Wigan this season, putting him in confident mood for his fourth finals appearance.

Player to watch
Sochaux defender **Souleymane Diawara** is not well known on the international stage; that should change after the tournament.

Prediction
Semi-finalists.

ZIMBABWE

Heavy defeat…Zimbabwe lost 5-1 to finals opponents Nigeria in their last qualifier

Nickname
Warriors.

Nations Cup finals appearances
2.

Best Nations Cup performance
Won one game, against Algeria, on their debut finals appearance in 2004 but did not make it past the first round.

Status in African football
Nearly men.

How they qualified
By finishing third in their group behind Angola and Nigeria. Zimbabwe lost 5-1 to the Nigerians in the final game – not a great omen for their Nations Cup encounter.

Like lightning…Mwaruwari

Coach
Charles Mhlauri has had considerable domestic success in Zimbabwe but this is a major step up for the 36-year-old, the youngest coach at the tournament.

Key men
Peter Ndlovu will retire from international football after the tournament at the age of 32 and his departure will leave a big hole in Zimbabwe's attack.
New Portsmouth signing **Benjani Mwaruwari** has battled with injury problems but is lightning quick and a good finisher.
Tinashe Nengomasha is Zimbabwe's pocket battleship and the main midfield ball winner.

Player to watch
Esrom Nyandoro is an elegant and honest midfielder with a great work ethic and bundles of potential.

Prediction
Exit at the group stage.

Group D

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'We'll be ready for

England manager Sven Goran Eriksson talks to Keir Radnedge

● What lessons did you draw from England reaching "only" the quarter-finals in 2002?

After we came back and reviewed everything it was clear to me, from the fatigue among so many of the players at the World Cup, that the Premiership needed either a significant winter break or a four-week break before the finals. We got it for Euro 2004 in Portugal and now we have got it for the Germany World Cup.

● Why does it matter so much?

In the first of those four weeks I will send the players away for a holiday. I think that's very important, physically and mentally. They are coming off the back of a very tough season which is non-stop, while Italy, Spain, Germany and most of the other countries have had two weeks off or more over Christmas and New Year. At that time of year you will not find one Italian player in Italy. They're always in Mauritius or Hawaii or wherever, on the beach. It's good for them as men and players. It's also the law in Italy. The players' union is so strong you cannot even bring in a player on trial over the holiday, not even for training.

● Presumably, the time is not only important to refresh the players but also for you to work more intensely – on tactics, for example – than you usually can before an international?

Quite. Before the last World Cup we went to Dubai the day after the FA Cup Final. We made all the initial tests and the next day I met the fitness coach, the other coaches, the doctors and masseurs. I said: "What shall we do with them? They are all exhausted."

● What is the greatest strength of this England team?

Experience, yet no one is too old. Sol Campbell and David Beckham are probably the oldest. I think we have the necessary quality. If you look back at the European Footballer of the Year poll there were three England players in the top 10. That does not happen very often.

● What do you think of the group draw?

It's better than four years ago. We face Sweden again, but where we had Argentina we now have Paraguay and instead of Nigeria we have Trinidad & Tobago. So, on paper it is less difficult than in 2002, though I won't say it's an easy group. Paraguay are a good team, much better than people give them credit for. Sweden, of course, we know. As for Trinidad & Tobago, I understand they are still looking to recruit new players because they will try anything to try to beat us.

● You have always been loyal to 4-4-2. Why?

For one thing, the system suits us very well, and the players play in that kind of formation with their clubs week in, week out. Very few Premier League teams play any other system. Chelsea do, of course, but we can't play like Chelsea, even though we tried it against Wales and Northern Ireland. I've always used 4-4-2.

● What does the system offer a coach?

Of course, if you don't defend well you will never have a good team. But it is easier to defend if you are tight, which is what you can do with 4-4-2. In midfield you can make it difficult for the opposition to play their football. If we don't do that right against Brazil, Argentina, Germany or whoever, then everything else falls down. But if we get it right then, when we win the ball, we have a good chance of creating an early break – which is always the best way because one through pass and your striker is in on goal. If you cannot play an early ball then having so many players around means you can keep the ball until something develops.

'You can feel the spirit the moment you go into the dressing-room'

● Would you ever vary tactics?

When I was in Sweden I stuck with 4-4-2 through thick and thin and I didn't care what kind of players I had; I had decided I liked this system and that was it. Later, after I moved to Italy, I started to change a little. But what matters most are the players, not the system.

● In what mood are the players approaching the finals?

They are convinced they can beat any team, which is a change from Korea and Japan. We were quite confident then but the spirit now is much stronger. You can feel it the moment you go into the dressing-room and you can feel it out on the training pitch. And why not, when we have players like David Beckham, Steven Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Michael Owen and Wayne Rooney?

● How good is Rooney?

He is considered one of the best attacking players in the world today – not only by English people but by fans and managers and players in other countries. He has everything. He can do everything. And he already has so much experience even though he is still only 20.

● Can Peter Crouch fit into your system?

I like Crouch, and even though he does not look like a footballer, in fact he is a good one. For a man so tall he has very good feet and he not only wins balls in the air, he can also control it on the ground. Of course, his height gives us something very different because opponents cannot compete with him up there. It's good to have him in the squad. Very good.

● Is Beckham still a significant force?

He is our captain and he has gained a lot of experience in international football. He's been having a good season for Real Madrid even though their results have not been so good and has been one of their best players. This may be a particularly important World Cup for him because it could be his last. He must think about that.

● But his captaincy is a subject of controversy, isn't it?

I've never understood that. I suppose people remember Tony Adams when he was captain of Arsenal and playing for England and now they see in John Terry the same type of player. But Beckham has been our captain for five years so I don't see any reason why I should change it just six months before the World Cup.

● Why is there still a problem finding someone to play on the left of midfield?

One obvious reason is that 70 per cent or more of footballers are right-footed and we don't have the left-footed equivalent of Beckham or Shaun Wright-Phillips. We do have Wayne Bridge and Ashley Cole, who could take the role, or do it together, but lately Joe Cole has been doing a fine job.

● What was the most difficult moment during qualifying?

We had two unpleasant results – from our own point of view and in terms of the press reaction. The first was the opening game, the draw with Austria. The second, which was much worse, was the defeat by Northern Ireland in Belfast. At least with the Austria game we were able to put it right very quickly because we played – and beat – Poland the following Wednesday. After Northern Ireland we had to wait a month before we had the chance to regain winning form.

anyone’

● You took a lot of flak personally…

Yes, for a while the press didn’t like Sven. But things like that happen in football, unfortunately, and it could have been my fault as well because when we played Denmark, Wales and Northern Ireland many of the players were not in good form. But that’s history now. You have to get on with it.

● Who are your toughest rivals in Germany?

On paper, the toughest must be Brazil. It’s hard to remember a World Cup, even for Brazil, when they were such big favourites going into the tournament. Maybe 1982. They had a very good team and should have won the World Cup that year.

● Who would you like to meet in the Final?

Does it matter? If we get to the Final, whoever we have to play, we will be ready for them.

● If you could change anything about football, what would it be?

I’d like two time-outs, one in each half, to be shared by both coaches. You decide before the game when to call it – maybe after 22 and a half minutes. It would also give a chance for the players to have a drink and would make it easier to substitute players, because you wouldn’t have those scuffles between the manager, his assistant and the fourth official. I would also like to see video referees. The referee today is under enormous pressure because every decision is subject to 10 angles on television. Also, today’s game is much tougher for the match officials because it is much faster. I would introduce a video referee to whom the match referee could refer decisions over whether a foul was committed just outside the penalty box or just inside it.

● Has the Bosman verdict made life more difficult for national coaches?

Not so much in England because the way the system and culture work means good young English players will always come through to the team because you can see them coming through the Premier League. I’m not particularly worried about it. There is talk of enforcing a six-five split between homegrown players and foreigners. But what would happen if a foreign player is turned away because the quota is full? He would go to the European Court and we all know what would happen. If you want to open up Europe in terms of work opportunities, then you cannot take football out of the equation.

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MAIN MEN

Luis Figo

Revitalised at Internazionale and relishing his last hurrah with Portugal

WALTER SAMUEL'S criticism of Real Madrid for releasing Luis Figo gives an indication of the World Cup potential offered by one of the world's outstanding footballers over the past 10 years.

Madrid offloaded Figo to Internazionale during the summer, whipping him away from a pre-season training camp so he did not even have a chance to say goodbye to the Bernabeu fans he had eventually won over after his controversial move from Barcelona.

Samuel, who trod the same path between Madrid and Milan but left not a ripple in the Spanish football ocean, says: "I do not understand why Madrid let Figo go. He has been great for us at Inter, and at Madrid last season was the heartbeat of the team.

"He gave 110 per cent every match, he kept super-fit and focused. When a team is struggling these are the players you need. Still, their loss is our gain."

Also Portugal's gain. If nothing else, Figo's move away from the machinations of Madrid has reignited his enjoyment in playing, crucial to his decision to give the national team one last shot.

The 33-year-old has won more titles and honours than even Eusebio. The Spanish championship with Barcelona and Real Madrid, the World Club Cup, Champions League, European Cup-winners Cup and European Supercup, the FIFA World Player of the Year and European Footballer of the Year awards.

Figo also played a record 112 times before retiring from the national team after they finished bitterly disappointed runners-up at Euro 2004. "The pressure was very intense because we were hosts," he says. "Afterwards I felt I needed a break, the chance to see more of my family. I did not expect to play again for Portugal because by then I was 31 and I thought the coach [Luiz Felipe Scolari] would want to rebuild his team around younger players.

"I did not want to be in the way or to be the cause of any awkward stories. I had had enough of that. But after a while, I regained my enthusiasm for international football and decided I wanted to make a new start – obviously, only if the coach and the country wanted me. It seems they did."

'I decided on a new start but only if the country wanted me'

This is, for sure, the last hurrah. Figo is among the final few survivors of Portugal's "golden generation", who won two World Youth Cups in the early 1990s but never managed to take silverware at senior level.

As for the circumstances of his departure from Madrid, Figo says: "I don't particularly blame the coach at the time, Vanderlei Luxemburgo. He had his job to do and I know where the orders were coming from and who was picking the team. There is only one person who runs the show at Real Madrid and everyone knows it."

He refuses to name president Florentino Perez as the culprit but the inference is plain. In any case, Figo has moved on.

"My family are happy in Milan," he says, "and it has helped having three of my old Madrid team-mates here. With Santiago Solari, Walter Samuel and Esteban Cambiasso it's been like picking up a conversation again from the night before."

There will be more talking to do, apart from other tests of self-belief, as Figo leads Portugal on his last World Cup adventure.

Keir Radnedge

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Joachim Low

Klinsmann's right-hand man leaving nothing to chance for the hosts

IT'S A QUESTION for idle commentators during the World Cup – who is the guy next to Jurgen Klinsmann? The answer, "Joachim Low", is guaranteed only to prompt the response: "And who is he?"

That latter question was also asked by German fans when Klinsmann, himself controversially appointed, announced his No 2 in the summer of 2004 after the European Championship debacle.

The choice of Low was a gamble. The two men knew each other vaguely from having studied six weeks together on a coaching course. But a meeting at an idyllic lakeside restaurant near Freiburg after Klinsmann's appointment persuaded the former Germany forward that the 45-year-old was the man for the job. "We threw some ideas around," says Low. "If our philosophy had not matched up then I would not be here now.

"The attraction of working towards the World Cup in your own country is enormous. It's the highest possible level for any trainer. This is where the biggest stars are made and the bigger stories are written."

Klinsmann and Low not only agreed verbally on how to work, they also set it down in writing so their individual responsibilities were clear. Klinsmann's double life – at work in Germany, at home in California – meant nothing could be left to chance: staff, structure, communication systems and even how to cope with grumbles from clubs and regional federations.

Low says: "This is the foundation of our inner strength. If you have thought through every aspect of your work and are convinced you are following the right path it is easier to persuade others to follow you.

"Transparency is the key word. Everyone on the staff has bought in to the common strategy for the World Cup project. Then we always listen to the players for the sake of mutual motivation so, if there's an issue, we can say: 'Let's tackle it together.' "

Low has two roles, co-ordinator off the pitch, tactician in the technical area.

Off the pitch, he ensures everyone understands the rules and follows them. Every player must be punctual for departure to the training ground, "whether he has five caps or 100". Initially, that was a problem, so Low got tough. It was him or them. Now Low gets his way – "no compromises".

Nor does he tolerate dissent. More than one of Germany's campaigns at a major finals has been undermined by players' petty rivalries and jealousies. That should not happen again under the current managerial team, with all the players expected to be prepared to accept a place on the bench without question. Low says: "After the defeats by Slovakia and Turkey we laid it on the line: 'No more displays like those.' We need 101 per cent commitment. Anyone who cannot guarantee that can stay away."

He also is fully focused on the condition of the squad, saying: "We want the players to follow a daily plan that covers training, rest and relaxation, and nutrition. After all, a master chef makes more effort at the Culinary Olympics. So why not footballers in their World Cup? It's just logic."

Low has had his critics, notably Bayern Munich's high-profile general manager Uli Hoeness. Irritated by Low's comment that every player should produce 15 or 20 per cent more in the national interest, Hoeness asked: "Who is Joachim Low? What has he ever won?"

The answer is two trophies. Low coached Stuttgart to the German Cup in 1997 and FC Tirol to the Austrian championship in 2002. Those successes have been balanced by a short, unhappy time in Turkey and various comings and goings in German football's lower reaches.

Since teaming up with Klinsmann, Low has travelled extensively in western Europe, analysing coaching methods and tactical styles. This, above all else, is his forte on the training ground or during a match.

He analyses everything from the line of defence to channels of play and even the flight of the ball. If a variation is needed, Low will scrawl the instruction on his notepad, explain it to the player, then rip up the sheet just in case the opposition find it. He leaves nothing, but nothing, to chance.

Keir Radnedge

'If our philosophy had not matched up then I would not be here now'

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MAIN MEN

Antonio Cassano

Can Italian football's naughty child turn over a new leaf in Spain?

WILL ROMA'S LOSS prove to be Real Madrid's gain? That is one of a number of intriguing questions that arise following the transfer of 23-year-old Antonio Cassano to the court of the galacticos. The others include: Is the naughtiest boy in Italian football sincere when he talks about turning over a new leaf? And, if and when he settles down and starts to play well, what will be the repercussions for Italy's World Cup squad?

Cassano's move from Roma was, of course, long overdue. Ever since he returned from Euro 2004, convinced that he had been the only saving grace of an otherwise disastrous campaign, the young forward has been unsettled at the club. No one is more aware of that than his coaches over the past 18 months – Rudi Voller, Gigi Del Neri, Bruno Conti and Luciano Spalletti – who have all come badly unstuck with regard to Cassano.

In the first week of the new year, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez gathered his players and staff together for a pep talk in which he called on them to show "unity, quality, courage and professionalism" in the struggle to put the club back on top of Spanish and European soccer. Down at Roma's Tregoria training ground, they could have been forgiven for smiling wryly at such words. No one in the camp would have any doubts about the "quality" or "courage" of Cassano but some would be less convinced about his "professionalism" and his ability to inspire "unity" in the dressing-room.

"Antonio has huge talent, he has a great touch, and from that point of view I'm glad we had him here at Roma," the club's sports director Daniele Prade commented in the week of his transfer. "But I would separate the two Cassanos – the on-the-pitch and off-the-pitch versions…I just hope our young players model themselves on how he behaved on the pitch and not his behaviour off it."

There is no denying that, rightly or wrongly, Roma feel betrayed by Cassano. After all, they shelled out £17million for the boy wonder in May 2001 when he was still only 18. Almost five years later, they have traded him for just £3.4m.

Mind you, given the stress and strain of the past six months, Roma were glad to get anything at all since Cassano's refusal to

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sign a new contract meant there was a very real risk he would go on a free transfer this summer. Furthermore, given the extent to which the "Cassano affair" had become a costly distraction for Roma, the club was doubtless glad to be rid of a player who, clearly, did little for squad togetherness.

The fact is that Cassano earned himself a reputation for being a serious troublemaker during his time with Roma. From late-night car crashes to walking off the training pitch in a huff, the youngster was regularly involved in controversial incidents. Voller was coach for just a month at the start of last season, but had a series of run-ins with Cassano. The most serious was on the morning of Roma's ill-fated Champions League tie at home to Kyiv Dynamo when the German became so infuriated with the player's lack of professionalism that he sent him home.

Cassano's attitude also got under the skin of some of his illustrious team-mates. In his early days at Roma, the youngster was taken under the wing of captain Francesco Totti, even to the extent of becoming a regular visitor to the Totti family home and considering Totti's father, Enzo, a trusted adviser. That relationship has clearly deteriorated over the past 18 months, as indicated by Cassano himself in his first news conference as a Real player. He took a neat little sideswipe at his former captain, saying: "Last year Zidane said that I was a better player than Totti. Now, if Zidane says that, you've got to believe him."

Totti responded by wishing Cassano the best of luck, adding: "Seeing as how he didn't bother to come and say goodbye to us all at Roma, we'll say it for him."

'Seeing as how he didn't bother to say goodbye to us, we'll say it for him'

Former mentor Francesco Totti takes a dim view of Cassano's behaviour

Cassano was, of course, fully entitled to want away from a Roma side currently going nowhere (they were just seventh in the League after 18 games, 22 points behind leaders Juventus).

The fact that he turned up at Madrid some 5kg above his ideal, fully-fit weight may say more about his lack of competitive football over the past six months than his professional attitude.

What is sure is that Cassano is a brilliantly talented player. If and when he rediscovers his best form, national coach Marcello Lippi is unlikely to overlook him for Germany this summer. For some while now, Lippi has appeared to consider Cassano part of his ideal first-choice attack, playing alongside Milan's Alberto Gilardino and with Totti in behind them.

If and when Cassano rejoins the squad, however, just what will be his relationship with his former Roma team-mate, arguably the dominant figure in the Italy camp? Lippi will surely have to call on all his diplomatic skills to ensure harmony within his squad.

Paddy Agnew

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THE STADIUMS

Paying the price…Borussia's makeover of the Westfalenstadion led the club to the verge of bankruptcy

Dortmund

Sit-down feast

THE MOST PROMINENT feature of Dortmund's Westfalenstadion will not be on show at the World Cup finals. FIFA's insistence on all-seater stadia means the ground's 25,000-capacity south terrace – the largest standing area in Europe – must undergo one of its periodic conversions to seating.

The "Opera House of German Football", has a capacity of 82,000 for Borussia Dortmund's League games. The all-seater criterion means there will be 20,000 fewer for the Ruhr city's six World Cup games, which include a semi-final, but the atmosphere should be just as good. The ground is built for excitement, its cavernous innards encouraging a crescendo of noise.

Built for the 1974 World Cup finals, it was the stage on which Johan Cruyff's brilliant Holland swaggered. But today's stadium bears little relation to the English-style arena of 30 years ago with its four identical stands built tight to the touchline.

Over the past 15 years, in which Borussia have won three Bundesliga titles and the 1997 Champions League, there have been some spectacular upgrades. In 1992, the North Stand terracing was replaced with seating, each stand was given an extra tier between 1995 and 1999, and corner in-fills were added two seasons ago.

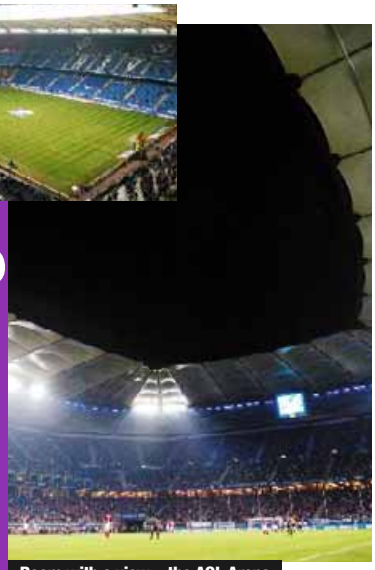
Further modernisation took place last summer. Seating in the lower tier was improved, a VIP area opened, an electronic access system installed and the dressing-rooms refurbished.

It was the first time a German club had financed a stadium-expansion programme all from their own pocket. And the costs led Borussia to the brink of bankruptcy earlier this year, since they coincided with their failure to qualify for recent Champions Leagues, dwindling TV income and poor big-money signings.

A moratorium on rent and loan repayments staved off insolvency. But the ground had been sold to property group Molsiris and the club were struggling with their lease-back commitments. Meanwhile, the stadium naming rights have been auctioned, with insurance firm Iduna Signal bidding highest – £14m for five years. The Westfalenstadion is now officially the Iduna Signal Park. Yet neither name will be used at the World Cup. FIFA's restrictions on the use of sponsor names means it will be called the World Cup Stadium Dortmund. Catchy, eh?

Nick Bidwell

Hamburg



Room with a view…the AOL Arena

Best foot forward

WHAT'S AFOOT AT the AOL Arena, aka the Hamburg World Cup Stadium? Arrive at the north-eastern entrance of Hamburger SV's magnificent new ground – built between 1998 and 2000 on the site of their old Volksparkstadion home – and you cannot fail to notice the bronze sculpture of a foot. It is modelled on that of all-time great striker Uwe Seeler, who spent his entire career at the club and won 72 West Germany caps.

The Volksparkstadion, a 60,000-capacity bowl built in 1953 in the north-west suburb of Altona, was never particularly popular with Hamburg fans. It had only two cantilevered stands, leaving the rest of the ground open to the elements, and most vantage points were well back from the pitch. So few mourned when plans were drawn up in 1998 to raze the structure and start again.

The results are stunning. For nearly £70million, Hamburg now has a multifunctional stadium as comfortable as it is visually appealing.

The once-mandatory umbrellas and field-glasses are now left at home, and spectators for the five World Cup games to be held in Hamburg will be sure of an unforgettable experience. The seating is excellent, there are optimal sightlines and cover for 45,422 spectators, a pair of giant video screens, wide concourses boasting a variety of food and drink stands, restaurants, 2,500 VIP seats and 51 luxury boxes. The stadium even offers more sunlight than its predecessor, having been rotated 90 degrees to run north to south.

At last a stadium to match the status of Germany's second largest city.

Nick Bidwell

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Power, passion and Pele

Germany's captain picks his World XI

I'LL HAVE **Oliver Kahn** in goal. Not only because he's my team-mate at Bayern, but also because in the national team I see his ambition, his charisma and his willingness to succeed. He has also achieved so much.

I would choose **Cafu** at right-back because he is a very strong defender and so dynamic. I admire his positive attitude, his forward runs, his ability to cut in at the right moment, and the fact that he is incredibly fit for his age.

One of the centre-backs would be **Jurgen Kohler** because he had such an impressive career. He's got that truly German virtue of being a strong fighter. I think he would put fear into a lot of strikers.

Alongside him I'd have **Lucio**, whom I've played with at Bayern and Leverkusen. He's got a great personality and is the epitome of a winner. He's terrifyingly dynamic as a defender and also very strong on the attack.

At left-back I'd play **Paolo Maldini** because, just like Cafu, he's been very strong in that position for more than a decade. He's a lot like Andy Brehme, who I also completely admire in that position. Even at his ripe old age Maldini still has this immense following in Italy and he's got a tremendous personality. A great sportsman.

I'd have **Emerson** alongside **me** in central midfield. I played alongside him at Leverkusen and he's got it all – power, dynamism, a goal threat, keeps his cool with the ball, and great charisma. He also makes very few mistakes.

Ze Roberto, my long-time team-mate at Bayern, would be in left midfield. He's one of the best dribblers in the world, very skilful, and when he's fit you won't find a better player in that position.

On the right, I'd put **Ronaldinho**, one of the best players in the world at the moment. He's got amazing technique, is very dynamic, a true all-rounder.

Up front I'd like to have **Marco Van Basten**. I know he's not active any more but I think he was the defining striker of his time, absolutely perfect, he could do anything.

Next to him I think it would have to be **Pele**, who I haven't often had the chance to see playing. But what a feast for the eyes he was. One of the all-time greats.

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Historic figure…but Bosman has never received true credit for his stand

Bosman:

The ground-breaking Belgian should not be blamed for football's ills

TEN YEARS AGO, European football was slowly starting to get to grips with the enormity of Jean-Marc Bosman's historic legal strike against the establishment. The practical consequences were an end to restrictions on the importing of players from other European Union countries and the enforcement of players' rights to a fee-free transfer on the expiry of their contract.

But an even more significant legacy was laid down in Bosman's action against FC Liege for blocking his transfer to Dunkerque in 1990 – the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg also established the principle that the law of the land takes precedence over the laws of the game.

From international transfer regulations to television rights to World Cup ticketing, FIFA and UEFA now go first to the European Commission to confirm the legality of their business plans. Football is no longer its own boss, which, on balance, may not be such a bad thing.

But in the commercial maelstrom of the past decade, Bosman the man and what he wanted initially to achieve have become emasculated. "Bosman" has become a swearword in one corridor of power and the key to a footballing Fort Knox in another.

His action also prompted the creation of an informal Ministry of Misinformation about the reality of December 15, 1995.

In fact, Bosman did not go to the European Court, he went to the Belgian courts. It was a tribunal in Liege that passed the buck by deciding that the issue was one on which, under the terms of the Treaty of Rome, only the European Court had the jurisdiction to pronounce.

Few people beyond Bosman, Liege, the Belgian federation and their lawyers were aware of the decision. Some outsiders even had the wrong player in mind, confusing the Belgian journeyman pro with Dutchman John Bosman, a free-scoring centre-forward with Alkmaar, Twente, Anderlecht, PSV, Mechelen and Ajax. John Bosman scored 17 goals in 30 games for Holland yet, ironically, the Bosman place in football history is filled by a player with only a fraction of his talent.

In the summer of 1990 the little-known Jean-Marc was no longer wanted by FC Liege. They made that clear by offering him a vastly-reduced contract proposing a wage cut of 75 per cent to £450 a week. When he refused, as the club had expected, they agreed a £65,000 sale to French Second Division side Dunkerque. However, on the eve of completion, Liege upped the fee to £200,000. Dunkerque could not afford it and Bosman was not worth it. Hence the impasse.

This would not have been possible in France, which had long since embraced legislation enforcing a *contrat a temps* – giving an employee the right to decide his own future on the expiry of his contract. Other countries, such as England, had also established mechanisms to resolve valuation disputes over a player whose contract had expired.

Thus Bosman set in train legal action that took five years, cost him his livelihood, his home and his marriage and, ultimately, made many other players rich beyond their wildest dreams.

But not Bosman himself. "I always thought we could win the fight, but I did not think we would win so completely," he said at the time. "I'm proud to have the courage to do what no other player had dared do before me. I have proved that football is not above the law and I hope that, in years to come, my fellow players will recognise that achievement."

Few players now, lacking concern or knowledge about the pre-Bosman days, recognise their debt.

December 1995 ushered in a new era. Yet the terms of the original

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Ten years on

verdict, reached in defiance of intense pleading from FIFA, UEFA and European national associations, were tight. They stated merely that it was illegal for clubs in the European Union to discriminate on the grounds of another EU nationality and they stated that players at the end of a contract who wished to transfer into another EU country could do so fee-free.

It was a judgement of anomalies of which the football authorities themselves had no option but to make sense.

While UEFA president Lennart Johansson and chief executive Gerd Aigner stuck their heads in the sand and pretended nothing had changed, the national leagues – driven by the happily-disbelieving clubs – took the initiative.

Within six months all the EU national associations had scrapped contract-end transfer fees at domestic level. It was the only way to prevent the chaos threatened by transfer subterfuge, such as in the Thomas Helmer case. (The German central defender, out of contract with Borussia Dortmund, was headed for Bayern Munich. Lyon were lined up as go-betweens: Helmer would move free from Dortmund to Lyon and then, a week or so later, move fee-free again from Lyon to Bayern. The Germans changed their rules in time to avert such a farce.) Only the common sense of the clubs prevented the 1995-96 Champions League campaign from descending into anarchy.

The Bosman judgement declared UEFA's three-plus-two foreign player restriction (three foreigners plus two assimilated) null and void. While UEFA dithered and waffled, the clubs made a gentleman's agreement to play to those rules for the rest of that season. After that the gloves were off.

'The big clubs have profited from my case but they never say so'

Bosman himself got left behind in the rush. Today he says: "I live the life of an ordinary citizen. I have no job but nor do I have the right to claim income support. When I went to claim benefit I was told I needed to have worked for at least two and a half years.

"I am living off the interest of what remains of the court award after I had paid all my legal costs, which was around £280,000. Apart from that I am still fighting the tax authorities. In 1997 they ruled that I should pay 33 per cent of my award. I paid. But then they said, since I was a professional footballer, I should have paid 55 per cent. I refused because I was no longer a pro.

"There has also been a dispute over financial gifts the Dutch national team, some Belgian players and a few other footballers from abroad sent me. The taxman says these were earnings, while I maintain they were unsolicited gifts.

"FIFPro [the organisation for professional footballers] recently made an annual grant to me for each of the next 10 years so I can live reasonably and be some use to them. They have paid certain legal costs for which I did not have the resources. I think they realise it would have reflected badly on them if I won my case without their support.

"If I had my time over, I would do the same again. But, all in all, it's been hard. For example, the big clubs have profited from my case but they never say so. Yet, when things go badly, then I get the blame." Indeed, people who should know better blame Bosman in defiance of all the evidence. UEFA chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson said recently: "Abolition of three-plus-two… meant that education and training didn't mean anything any more. It meant that those clubs who had access to all the television revenue started to rob those smaller clubs who actually produced talent and trained players. They even bought players to weaken the opposition, not only to get stronger themselves."

In what world has he been living?

The explosion in star players' wages has made it all the more important now for clubs to bring on their own players. They may look far further afield for these superkids but even the biggest clubs invest far more now in youth development than ever before.

Transfer turmoil…Helmer's move to Bayern was cloaked in subterfuge

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Critical…Lars-Christer Olsson has spoken out against the effects of the Bosman ruling

Why have Real Madrid and Barcelona opened coaching academies abroad? Not just for the merchandising. Why did Chelsea lure away Frank Arnesen from Tottenham? Not so Arjen Robben had another Dutch speaker hanging around Stamford Bridge.

As for Olsson's contention that the big clubs are buying players partly to keep them out of rivals' hands, does he know nothing of the transfer market greed of Madrid and Barcelona, Milan and Juventus, Benfica and Sporting Lisbon even in the 1950s?

Other critics contend that the loss of transfer income has sent smaller clubs into bankruptcy and forced them to inflate the price of tickets to compensate. But small clubs can still sell players while their contracts remain "live". In any case, the advent of revenue streams such as television, shirt adverts, catering and sponsorship were not available to minnow clubs throughout the majority of the 20th century. To blame Bosman for such bankruptcies is revisionist, excuse-seeking nonsense.

UEFA the beneficiary

Not everyone thinks the same as Olsson and co. Thomas Kurth, a UEFA insider at the time of Bosman who later "came out" with G-14, says: "The problem was that football was not ready for the decision. The laws were there at the time, before Bosman, but they chose to abuse the law."

Nothing much has changed, deep down, according to FIFPro's general secretary, Theo Van Seggelen. He says: "UEFA people come and listen and even talk to us sometimes, but then they go ahead and make their decisions on their own. They still act as if they are above the law."

The status of the big clubs was not altered by Bosman. They remain, as ever, fighting a day-by-day, week-by-week battle for league table supremacy. Wanting the best players at the best mutual price is reasonable behaviour in professional football's market-led economy.

Yet the greatest beneficiary of Bosman has been an organisation that does not have to worry about competition because it is a self-serving monopoly. Its name: the Union of European Football Associations, UEFA.

Ignore all the whingeing, griping and moaning about Bosman that has emanated from Geneva and Nyon over the past decade. The truth is damning and tells an utterly different story.

The Champions League, which generates almost more money than UEFA knows how to handle, would not have achieved such high-profile, superstar-studded glamour, nor would it have attracted such million-encrusted television and sponsor contracts, had it not been for the creation of the cosmopolitan supersquads boasted by Juventus, Milan, Internazionale, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Arsenal, Liverpool, Chelsea and the rest.

Complain about Bosman? UEFA should raise a statue to the man outside their swish, glass and steel, state-of-the-art headquarters on the banks of Lake Geneva for which he was, indirectly, partly responsible.

SPORT IN COURT: FOR AND AGAINST

1976
The European Court rejected an appeal by lower-league Italian club Rovigo against an Italian League ban on foreign players.

2000
The European Court rejected a complaint by judoka Christelle Deliege against the nationalistic selection policy of the Ligue Francophone de Judo.

2000
The European Court rejected a plea by Finnish basketball player Jyri Lehtonen that he should be allowed to transfer out of Castors Braine outside the decreed transfer window.

2000
The French appeal court, taking note of European Court precedent, upheld a complaint by Polish basketball player Lilja Malaja against a refusal, under non-EU foreign player restrictions, to allow her to sign for Strasbourg. The court cited the Cotonou Accord between the EU and 77 countries from eastern Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

2003
The European Court supported a complaint by Slovak handball player Maros Kolpak against an exclusion from the German championship under foreign player restriction regulations. The court cited an agreement between Slovakia and the EU that enshrined workplace equality.

2004
The European Court of Justice was about to rule on a plea by Tibor Balog, Charleroi's Hungarian midfielder, that the transfer freedoms laid down by Bosman should also apply to non-EU citizens playing within the EU when FIFA conceded the point.

Court's backing…Simutenkov

2005
The European Court supported Russian footballer Igor Simutenkov against a Spanish bar on him joining Sevilla because of non-EU player restrictions. As in the Kolpak case, the court cited an agreement between Russia and the EU that enshrined workplace equality.

In progress
Belgian club Charleroi are claiming damages against FIFA after Moroccan midfielder Abdelmajid Oulmers suffered a serious knee injury on national team duty. The action has been joined by French champions Lyon, supported by G-14, over an injury suffered by defender Eric Abidal while playing for France.

Compensation claim…Oulmers

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MOVERS & SHAKERS ...the headline-makers off the pitch

Under scrutiny…Warner

Austin "Jack" WARNER...
the CONCACAF president is facing an investigation by the government of his native Trinidad & Tobago – under orders from Prime Minister Jack Manning – into his control of the islands' World Cup tickets.

Manning was responding to complaints that Simpaul Travel Service, the agency with exclusive rights to ticket sales in Trinidad, is owned by Warner, who is also a FIFA vice-president. Fellow directors include his wife Maureen and sons Daryan and Darryl.

Simpaul has been offering £2,730 travel packages that include tickets for three games, hotel accommodation for 12 nights and team souvenirs. Tickets cannot be purchased separately in Trinidad, and fans who want to travel independently must either enter the World Cup lottery or rely on touts.

Warner said: "It is not a crime to be successful, even for people like me."

Jean-Michel AULAS...
the Lyon president appears determined to drag French football kicking and screaming into the modern, commercial world. The club had big potential but little success – just three French Cups and one League Cup – before Aulas bought into them more than a decade ago. Now they boast four straight League titles, and only a major catastrophe will prevent them making that a record fifth in a row come May. Aulas also took Lyon into G-14 and is taking on both FIFA and the French government. His quarrel with FIFA relates to compensatory cover for players injured on international duty; his showdown with the government concerns the right of French sports clubs to go to the stock market for funds. Early signs suggest significant concessions on both fronts.

Holger BRACKEMANN...
is director of German consumer group Stiftung Warentest, which has criticised safety precautions at the World Cup stadia. Among other observations it stated: "Many of the conclusions drawn [after Heysel, Bradford and Hillsborough] have either been forgotten or partly ignored." The report focuses on structural deficiencies that would hinder fire and general emergency evacuation procedures. Tournament organising vice-president Wolfgang Niersbach acknowledged the need for minor adjustments but accused the consumer group of sensationalism.

Fights on his hands…Aulas

Arkady and Alexandre GAIDAMAK...
father Arkady, a Russian billionaire of uncertain pedigree, sprang into football's consciousness last autumn when buying Beitar Jerusalem – the Israeli club with the country's most notoriously racist fans. Gaidamak had established himself in Israel, where he has even formed a political party, after fleeing France after the issue of an international arrest warrant concerning weapons deals with Angola. Gaidamak has denied any guilt, just as he denied any involvement with the recent purchase by Alexandre, his 29-year-old son, of a half-stake in Portsmouth. Ominously, one of the first statements issued by Alexandre expressed "full support" for prodigal manager Harry Redknapp.

Lennart JOHANSSON...
confirmed that he will step down as UEFA president in 2007 after 17 years in the job. "It's time to go fishing," said the Swede, who has fought major health battles on one hand and battled with vested interest groups such as G-14 on the other.

Johansson succeeded Jacques Georges in 1990 and revolutionised the face of European (and world) club football by overseeing the launch and establishment of the Champions League.

He had planned to step down in 2002 but was persuaded to stay on by then chief executive Gerd Aigner to head off what was perceived as the "threat" of a Michel Platini succession. Platini has already signalled his intention to stand in next year's election. Franz Beckenbauer is a major prospective rival, but will not consider throwing his hat into the ring until after "his" World Cup in Germany and, crucially, after he has evaluated the personal financial loss of dumping up to eight personal marketing contracts.

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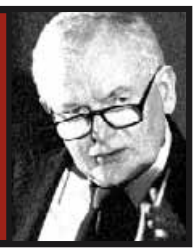
WS WORLD SOCCER GLOBAL VIEW Paul Gardner

I won't join cult of the coach



Mourinho is lauded when it's his players who deserve the credit

All-seeing…Mourinho is the messiah of the coach-as-god movement

I IMAGINE IT will not be long before somebody – most likely FIFA – will announce that we are all to celebrate the Year of the Coach. Next year, maybe, or the one after that, but pretty damn soon for sure.

Everything is in place, the apotheosis of the coach is coming along nicely. For me, it reached some sort of thoroughly objectionable climax on January 2, while I was watching West Ham v Chelsea on TV.

An hour in, with the score at 1-1, Chelsea brought on Hernan Crespo. And 44 seconds later the Argentinian scored the winning goal.

Both TV commentators were beside themselves. However, they weren't heaping praise on Crespo, but his coach, Jose Mourinho. "What a substitution!" were the first words, and the cameras quickly switched from shots of Crespo buried under a mound of team-mates to the touchline, for images of a surly, strutting Mourinho.

Only after the coach had been identified as the real genius behind the goal did we get a few words of praise for Crespo.

You may think it unfair to criticise Mourinho for all of this adulation, but that is not so. This is the man who called himself the special one, the man who repeatedly gets himself in the headlines with provocative statements.

No, I think it's absolutely right to pinpoint Mourinho as the messiah of the coach-as-god movement. He has all the requirements: unbounded faith in himself, a band of devoted followers (Chelsea fans), and charisma.

These are formidable qualities and it would be marvellous were Mourinho using them for the betterment of football. But he is using them to promote his own image and, much more damagingly, to cast the coach, rather than the players, as the key to winning games.

Brainwashed by hogwash

The commentary I quoted shows the extent to which we have become brainwashed by this hogwash. Crespo scores a nice goal, but Mourinho is the one who gets lauded? Worth pondering, that. Mourinho, of course, vigorously denies the charge that it is not his coaching but Roman Abramovich's money that has brought success to Chelsea.

Really? Consider that Crespo substitution. How many clubs can afford to keep a world-class forward like him on the bench and use him for occasional appearances or even as a lurking menace to make Didier Drogba play better? Mourinho's benchful of highly-paid stars plays a huge role in Chelsea's success.

Some will no doubt find it refreshing that Mourinho has bludgeoned his way into a position of power from where he can firmly put the modern player – the overpaid modern player, of course – in his place. To his admirers, Mourinho means discipline. How splendid to hear Mourinho publicly bawling out Joe Cole because he hadn't played the way the coach wants him to. What follows

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from that is that if Cole remains in the team, and if he does well, it's entirely to Mourinho's credit.

This was exactly the attitude adopted by another swollen coaching ego, that of Louis Van Gaal at Barcelona, when he benched Rivaldo and boasted "Rivaldo became Rivaldo only in my Barcelona". (A couple of years later Holland, coached by Van Gaal, failed to qualify for the 2002 World Cup, while Brazil, with Rivaldo a key player, won it.)

Van Gaal was criticised for forgetting that "he is dealing with human beings, not machines". He prattled on about "no player being bigger than the club or the club's philosophy" – by which he meant his own philosophy. Mourinho is a much more sophisticated, much subtler man than Van Gaal. But his approach is no different. What it does is to elevate the importance of the coach at the expense of the players. Whether that is Mourinho's intention matters little – that is the reality.

'When the game is controlled from the bench, it is unavoidable that it will become robotic'

It didn't work for Van Gaal, partly because of his bullying personality, but mostly because he didn't have the money to fill the bench with star substitutes; so his Barcelona stopped winning.

Mourinho's Chelsea do win. They steamroller on – I'm using that archetypically mechanical word because there is something machine-like about this Chelsea, they are not a particularly attractive team to watch. That, I fear, is the inevitable result of the Van Gaal/ Mourinho approach. When the game is controlled from the bench, it is unavoidable that it will become robotic. The players are there to do what they're told, and that only. Cole, apparently, committed the ultimate sin of "playing for himself, for the public" – this, mind you, in a game that Chelsea won and in which Cole, to most observers, had played very well.

So, out go the Coles, to the bench go the Crespos, and what will eventually – and presumably ideally – remain will be a team of obedient workaholics. Mourinho admired Otto Rehhagel's terminally boring Greece side that won Euro 2004, saying: "Rehhagel did wonderful work…He had no stars, no players coming from the moon. Maybe football is changing, and teams are the big things, not individuals."

And what does "teams" mean, what can it mean, other than "coaches"? They are the new individuals. Not a desirable future. When the Year of the Coach comes around, count me out.

Control freak

DIMITRY PITERMAN is an American-Ukrainian former athlete and entrepreneur who competed in the triple jump in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. He first made his mark in football in January 2003 when buying a 25 per cent share in Racing Santander and announced his intention to take control in all areas at the club – including the team.

Piterman was denied a place on the Racing bench by the Spanish federation because he did not hold the requisite coaching badge. But he was determined to get it, announcing: "Any old idiot can run a country, but I need a piece of paper to sit on a bench!" So, he applied for other posts that give access to the bench, including club delegate and kit man. The federation refused all these applications, too, so he named himself club photographer and sat pitch-side in a bib next to the bench.

Three years on, Piterman is now president of Basque club Alaves, whom he bought out last season and steered to promotion. He is back in charge from the bench, challenging the game in Spain – and all over Europe.

How did you become president at Alaves?

When I retired [as an athlete], I went to live in Spain, and the mayor of the local town asked me to sponsor the team there, which was playing regionally. Then [Fourth Division] Palamos approached me and I started training the team with Chuchi Cos, taking them to the Third Division. Racing Santander contacted me and I bought 25 per cent of them, but when we couldn't close a deal for another 26 per cent, we moved on. Practically all the Second Division clubs got in touch, plus about 10 in the First Division, offering a 51 per cent package – Mallorca, Malaga, Valladolid… and, of course, Alaves.

You say clubs were queuing up for your help, and yet people all over Spain have criticised you.

In the beginning there was lots of criticism. I caught those poor people by surprise. They'd never seen anything like me before, they'd been living in a box. The level of the Spanish sports press is very low and they couldn't get their heads around me. They were unanimously against us, convinced Racing would go down, but we made sure of survival in the top division with six games to spare, and some of the critics

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What's an American-Ukrainian former Olympic athlete doing running a football club in the Basque region? Sid Lowe found out

were upset at having to acknowledge their ignorance. I'm not the kind of person who just takes abuse, so there was a lot of confrontation.

If you had done the same thing at Real Madrid they wouldn't have dared attack you.
Most of the press are from Barcelona or Madrid and it's easier to attack smaller teams, but Madrid are structured in a way that wouldn't permit a president to contemplate what I do anyway. I'd be more relaxed, and less criticised, if I sat in the director's box, but I assume all the risks. Normally, if there's a problem, the president sacks the coach and gets off the hook. I never get off the hook.

So why do it your way?
It's more honest. Elsewhere in Spain, club presidents construct all these layers – sporting director, vice-president, director of football, coach – between themselves and the blame. But it's false because they still go out and sign him, him and him.

Is that to say that Florentino Perez, for instance, actually decides everything at Real Madrid but when it comes to failure he steps back and says: "It's not my fault"?
Absolutely. Most presidents do. The scapegoat is always the coach or the sporting director. Take Arrigo Sacchi [recently departed as sporting director at Madrid]; he can succeed, but you need to give him total power. Thomas Gravesen was his signing but he's not playing. Sacchi chooses him, but the criteria of his coach and his president are different.

Is it the conflict of concepts that's the problem? By controlling everything, in theory you bypass it.
Exactly. The hardest part in any business is management of the structure. In Spain, it's too complicated. In the early days of Microsoft, Bill Gates wouldn't have put 20 managers in between him and the product. In football, unlike any other business, there are 25 highly-paid executives – the players. You need to control that closely and create a rational structure.

What do you say to claims that Chuchi Cos, your coach, is just your puppet.
Chuchi Cos is an employee of the club. He's no more a puppet than Vanderlei Luxemburgo was at Madrid. The question is: who has ultimate responsibility? The president. There's no reason to have a puppet – in any business. You just waste time. A huge mistake committed in Spain is giving the coach total power. Claudio Ranieri brings all the Italians to Valencia, but six months later he's gone and the players are stuck there at a huge cost. Presidents also lack the stamina to withstand pressure and become slaves to public opinion and the press; I refuse to. I work based on my philosophy.

'There's no justification for paying 50million euros for a player'

What is that philosophy?
Don't fight expensive battles. I don't know if it makes sense to win the League for 200million euros [£140m]. It's not a business, it's more a private theatre. There's no justification for paying 50m euros [£35m] for a player.

Ill-fated signing… Sacchi welcomes Gravesen to Real Madrid

In terms of results, how significant is the budgetary difference between Alaves and Barca?
There's normally a direct correlation between budget and League position, but occasionally someone breaks that line, like Real Sociedad or Deportivo La Coruna, who went from the Third Division to being a powerhouse. At Depor, there is one person [Augusto Cesar Lendoiro] who does everything and doesn't hide it. He has a simple structure. They have a two-room office and they were champions.

Isn't there a danger, though, that you don't know enough about football?
Football isn't that complex. There are people who can do both the football and the business side of things – like [Madrid's former sporting director] Jorge Valdano, for example – but not many. And the business side of it lets you compete. You don't have to pay 60m euros [£40m] for a player. It's illogical for one player to make more money than the value of all the shares. Big clubs have gluttony. Put a plate in front of them and they eat it all. Put a bigger plate in front of them and they eat all that, too, and another and another. A Rolls-Royce and a Fiat both get you to work, but some insist on making a statement. As soon as Madrid get some money they have this irrational exuberance and start spending like they're kings for a day. That's when mistakes become very expensive.

Why did you get into football, then? Can you make money in it?
I see a future in football – when it is run properly. Everyone makes money except the clubs. But if you look at the Fortune 500 in 1980, more than 50 per cent of the companies don't exist any more. Despite their instability, clubs are 100 years old and have outlived many multinationals. The hard thing is to enter this imperfect world and function as a perfect business.

Why did your battle to sit on the bench at Racing Santander matter? Couldn't you sit in the stands and have the same control?
Symbolism. You have a coach, an assistant coach, a goalkeeper coach, a masseur, a kit man…everyone can sit on the bench except the man responsible for the club. I was highlighting the absurdity and hypocrisy.

You now sit on the bench at Alaves. Is that officially as kit man?
Yes, or as delegate. They tried to amend the law so the delegate can't be a president just to stop me. We issued some threats and they realised the absurdity of it. The federation are now even talking about issuing a licence so the president can sit on the bench, which would alleviate all the problems. It's hard to conceive of any other business where the ultimate boss would be banned from parts of the business.

Is Spanish football too narrow-minded, too rigid, too conservative?
Not only football, society. There was a dictator for many years and even after he died the mentality survived. In the US we challenge everything; in Spain, change causes anxiety.

You've employed American sporting models and methods. Have they been difficult to impose on a Spanish club?
Sometimes. Spanish players are receptive but every new thing has to go through a

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test. It's like anything – first, they ridicule you, then they oppose you, then they try to kill you. Finally, they agree with you. Every new idea is a battle, but no more than when Copernicus said the world was round and they took his eyes out.

What can American sport teach Spain?
American sports are based on a franchise system, which improves stability. Relegation and promotion have huge economic consequences, which make clubs unstable and create desperation. In the States you finish last and think: "Next year, we'll be first." In Spain, you finish last and think: "Next year, we might disappear." People get nervous, lose their heads and commit even greater mistakes. If you make a mistake or have one bad year because of injuries, it shouldn't be punished.

But without relegation and promotion, the game would not be as entertaining.
That's not true. If teams had the stability of knowing they'll be in the top division a certain number of years, they'd play much more attacking football.

What else would you change?
Television rights. Madrid make 60m euros [£40m] in television and Alaves make only 7m euros [£4.8m] – that hurts the competitiveness of the League. In the States they also have instant replays, time-outs, and sin-bins rather than sendings-off. And let's have real game time. If it's 25 minutes, it's 25 minutes, not 45 minutes plus or minus something. Every time the ball goes out, stop the clock. The game would benefit economically from time-outs, too. You can stick commercials in.

Would you like to see the introduction of technology?
Definitely. In hockey the puck goes in and you know instantly that it's a goal. In football, they're still debating it weeks later. Two or three plays decide every game. What's wrong with taking three minutes to get it right? You can solve 90 per cent of problems. People say you'd lose some of the mystery, but there's no mystery.

Do you think football is backwards in embracing change?
Football is the least evolved sport in the world. When someone envisioned football, they decided the goals should be eight foot high, but now with human abilities improving, that's stupid. People used to high-jump 1.5m, now they jump 2.5m. It's harder to score. Everything is more defensive. People complain about fewer goals but no one does anything about it.

Would fans accept change?
They have in other sports. Evolution demands change. In javelin, they changed the centre of gravity. In *Chariots Of Fire* the guy trained with champagne glasses on the hurdles – that was enough to win an Olympic title. Now, it's complete sacrifice. The size of footballers is different, they used to play in hiking shoes with a heavy ball. There was no professionalism. Change will come but will we have to wait generations?

Big difference… Alaves' budget is a fraction of Barcelona's

You also defend greater freedom in contracts and employment.
If Nike has to pay 20 bucks an hour in the US, they move to Taiwan and pay one buck. Why can't a football club do the same? The club can't move, but it should be able to use other markets. Why can't I buy 10 Brazilians if it helps my club compete? And how can you limit professional freedom? If you sack a coach here, he can't manage another team that season – why? A player can only play for one team in the Champions League – I don't get the story on that. Often the rules conflict with civil laws.

Sepp Blatter wants to reintroduce quotas, even on Europeans.
If a club wants to play with 11 African players, that's their decision. Blatter isn't the judge. Besides, the market has been established legally. Quotas are unconstitutional.

What's your take on TV coverage, of games kicking off at 10pm and decisions about when matches are played taken eight days in advance?
It's madness. The television channels decide and we have no say. You play at nine or 10, you finish at 12 and, because you travel, most people get home at 2am. It's ridiculous, but the Spanish are a bit masochistic in that sense and it seems to work for them.

> **'Why can't I buy 10 Brazilians if it helps my club compete?'**

Finally, returning to Alaves, what are your goals for the club?
Faster, higher, stronger. The Olympic ideal has to be followed in any sport. The only failure is not making it your ultimate goal.

Will the day come when we see Alaves crowned Spanish champions?
Yes. I'm certain of that.

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HEAD CASES: the world's most eccentric club bosses

SINCE THE DEATH of Atletico Madrid president **Jesus Gil**, a vacancy exists for the unofficial title of football's most eccentric club owner.

One contender would be **Luciano Gaucci** of Italian club Perugia. Gaucci is best known for his publicity stunts – attempting to hire female players, signing Saadi Al-Ghadafy, son of Libyan dictator Colonel Ghadafy, and sacking South Korean Ahn Jung-hwan after his goal knocked Italy out of the 2002 World Cup. Gaucci's exploits have received less coverage since Perugia were relegated to the Third Division for financial irregularities.

Also in Italy, **Flaviano Tonellotto** has already sacked three coaches since buying Serie B side Triestina last summer and gained a reputation for interfering in team affairs. "The team should reflect the ideas not just of the coach but also the president," he said. "I'm ready to sit on the bench myself."

In France, **Louis Nicollin**, the straight-talking president of Montpellier, insists on sitting alongside his coach on the bench and celebrates goals a la Barry Fry, running along the touchline. Three years ago, larger-than-life Nicollin, who runs France's largest waste disposal company, cycled the 250 miles to Lourdes as part of a promise he made when his club avoided relegation, not an easy feat for such a big man.

Larger than life…Nicollin

Vasco da Gama's **Eurico Miranda** is one of the most controversial figures in Brazilian football. During more than 20 years as a club director, He has been involved in numerous pitch invasions and bust-ups with officialdom. In 2003, he faced calls for removal of his parliamentary immunity (he is also an MP) so he could face prosecution for his part in the collapse of a fence during the Brazilian championship Final between Vasco and Sao Caetano, which injured 70 supporters.

Gigi Oeri, heiress to the Roche pharmaceutical company, is a vice-president and major patron of Swiss club Basle. The perma-tanned former physio paints her nails in the club colours of red and blue. She has also funded the Basle doll's house museum, which boasts the world's largest collection of teddy bears.

Colours nailed…Oeri

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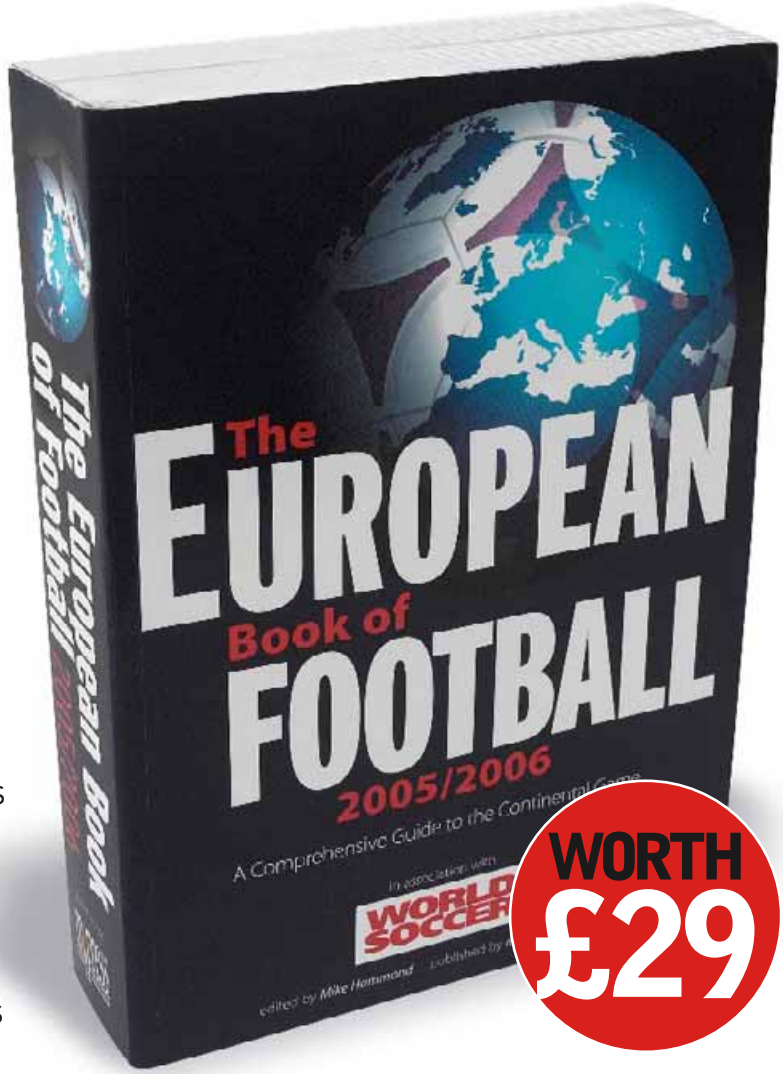

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DIGEST

NEWS AND REPORTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

WS WORLD SOCCER

Revamped but not revived

Sao Paulo beat Liverpool to win the Club World Championship in Japan but the Final was as unsatisfying as FIFA's new-look event as a whole. Keir Radnedge reports

Up and running...Edcarlos starts the celebrations as Sao Paulo beat Liverpool 1-0 in the Final

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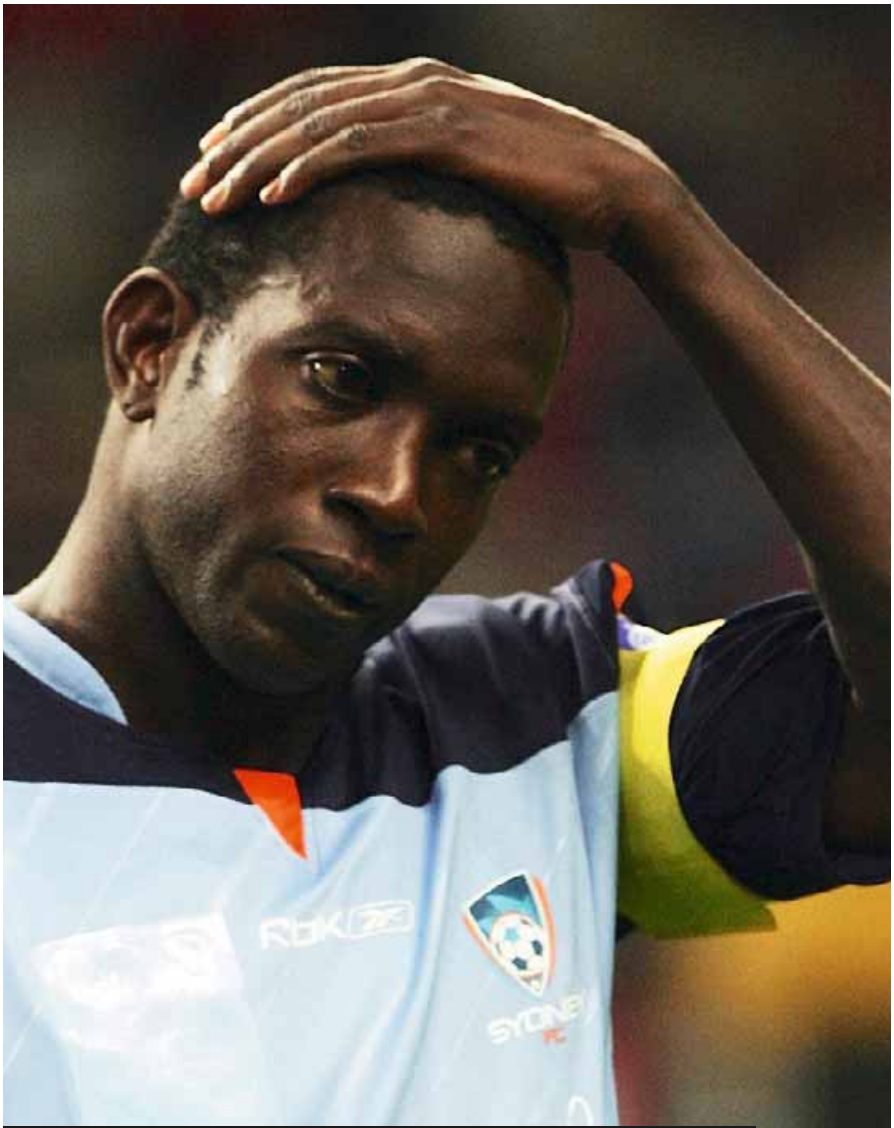

We've blown it…Sydney's Dwight Yorke is downcast after their first round defeat by Saprissa

RESULTS

FINAL

Dec 18 - International stadium, Yokohama
Sao Paulo (Bra) **1** (Mineiro 27)
Liverpool (Eng) **0**
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 66,821. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Sao Paulo: Rogerio Ceni - Cicinho, Fabio Santos, Edcarlos, Lugano, Junior - Mineiro, Josue, Danilo - Amoroso, Aloisio (Grafite 75).
Liverpool: Reina - Finnan, Carragher, Hyypia, Warnock (Riise 79) - Luis Garcia, Gerrard, Sissoko (Sinama-Pongolle 79), Xabi Alonso, Kewell - Morientes (Crouch 85).

1ST ROUND

Al Ittihad (Sau) **1 Al Ahly** (Egy) **0;**
Saprissa (CR) **1 Sydney FC** (Aus) **0**

Byes to semi-finals:
Liverpool, Sao Paulo

SEMI-FINALS

Liverpool 3 Saprissa 0;
Sao Paulo 3 Al Ittihad 2

5TH-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Sydney FC 2 Al Ahly 1

3RD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Saprissa 3 Al Ittihad 2

CLUB WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

THE JURY IS still out on FIFA's revamped Club World Championship following the unsatisfying Final victory of South American champions Sao Paulo over Liverpool, their European counterparts, in Yokohama.

This was the second staging of the world authority's club event, six years after the inaugural edition in Brazil. Another staging had been planned for Spain in 2001, but that was cancelled. The format of the 2005 event was altered from that of 1999 in an attempt to bring some sort of balanced competitive order to the tournament, which features the champion clubs of all six confederations and which has now replaced the World Club Cup, the one-off contest between the champions of Europe and South America, also staged in Japan.

Further refinements are in order. FIFA president Sepp Blatter suggested he agrees when he raised the possibility of next year's event being staged in Japan again but in indoor stadia such as the 2002 World Cup venue in Sapporo.

The 2005 event got off to a bumpy start when the clubs announced their squads. Foreign, i.e. imported, players were to blame. First, the late acquisition by Saudi side Al Ittihad of three Brazilians brought a protest from their first round opponents, Al Ahly of Egypt, then everybody whinged about the top-heavy make-up of Liverpool's squad.

FIFA settled the first issue by declaring Pedrinho, Marco Alberto and Lima Aparecido ineligible, and responded to the second by devolving responsibility to UEFA as governing body of European football, whose hands were tied by the European Commission. Liverpool included 16 imports in their 23-man squad compared with 10 in the other five put together.

Five-foreigner limit

Now it is being whispered that FIFA might seek to impose, unilaterally, a five-foreigner limit on the starting line-ups for next year. The danger then is that Europe's champions will use that as an excuse to duck out of the tournament altogether, leaving its future in doubt, since television and sponsors would be even less enthusiastic about the event.

The local support for the 2005 event was also half-baked. The matches barely drew half-capacity crowds, and FIFA may need to consider allowing a home club to play as hosts, just as Vasco da Gama did in Brazil in 1999.

The football itself was largely unmemorable. Al Ahly let their success in raising the complaint about Al Ittihad's Brazilians go to waste as they lost 1-0 to the Saudis. The Egyptians, unbeaten in nearly 18 months and 55 games under Portuguese coach Manuel Jose, went into the tie over-confident and paid the price 12 minutes from time when keeper Essam El-Hadary flapped at a cross from right-back Ahmed Al-Dosari and skipper Mohammed Noor scored easily from close range. Al Ittihad thus booked their place in a semi-final against Sao Paulo, who, like Liverpool, received a bye.

In the other first round tie, Costa Rica's Deportivo Saprissa beat Sydney FC, also 1-0, to set up a meeting with the European champions. Midfielder Cristian Bolanos struck two minutes into the second half, duly raced to the bench in delight and collapsed in tears. Luckless Sydney, led by Premiership old boy Dwight Yorke, finished with 10 men after defender Alvin Ceccoli was sent off for a collision with Saprissa keeper Jose Porras that appeared more clumsy than malicious.

Yorke, the former Manchester United striker, glanced a header just wide in the 32nd minute, while Saprissa's Gabriel Badilla came close to heading into his own net midway through the

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Lord of the dance…Ronald Gomez (No 11) leads the way after scoring Saprissa's late winner against Al Ittihad in the third-place play-off

second half. Apart from that, Sydney offered no attacking threat.

"We made history tonight," said Saprissa coach Hernan Medford. "We will face a great team now in Liverpool, but nothing is impossible in football."

Yet Liverpool's spies would have had no qualms about the challenge posed by the Purple Monsters from Central America. Saprissa were the better of two disappointing teams whose only excuse for the tepid standard of the game was the low temperature.

"The difference was experience and their finishing was better," said Sydney coach Pierre Littbarski, a World Cup winner with West Germany in 1990. "But I believe we represented Australia well."

Out of their depth

The incentive of facing a Pommie club might even have turned Sydney into more worthy opponents in the semi-finals. Saprissa looked surprisingly out of their depth considering that Costa Rica's national team, many of whose number play for Saprissa, will surely make a more competitive fist of their World Cup opportunity this summer. A club record 11th successive clean sheet and goals from Steven Gerrard and Peter Crouch (two) put Liverpool through to the Final at a canter.

Sao Paulo also scored three in their semi-final – one a penalty by keeper Rogerio Ceni – but defensive deficiencies allowed Al Ittihad to score twice and run the Brazilians too close for comfort.

In the Final, Sao Paulo fielded just one foreigner – Diego Lugano – to Liverpool's eight, but the Uruguayan proved one of three key figures in a game the English club dominated in terms of possession but lost after a smart early counter-attack finished with aplomb by Mineiro. Rogerio Ceni, the player of the tournament, was Sao Paulo's other hero with a string of fine saves.

Liverpool had fought back to win both the Champions League Final against Milan and the European Supercup against CSKA Moscow but they failed to make it three in a row despite a corner count of 17-0 in their favour.

They were unfortunate to have a late "equaliser" by Florent Sinama-Pongolle ruled out wrongly for offside. But, in the end, they were left believing that this competition is jinxed, no matter which name or guise it goes under. Liverpool also lost their two World Club Cup Finals – against Flamengo in 1981 and Independiente in 1984.

The Merseysiders returned to a madcap Christmas holiday League programme, from which they took an impressive 10 points out of a possible 12; Sao Paulo returned home to a celebratory reception so multitudinous that it took the team bus 10 hours to travel from airport to stadium to celebrate their third world title. The wilting winning players – including Cicinho, who was about to fly off to Spain to join Real Madrid – arrived as much bus-lagged as jet-lagged.

Coach Paulo Autuori, however, enjoyed the winning experience in Japan so much that he will stay on, having signed a contract to coach Kashima Antlers. Hail and farewell, all in one day.

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WHAT THEY SAID

"It's like a dream but at the same time we always had faith that we could beat Liverpool."
Sao Paulo goalkeeper Rogerio Ceni

"If you win it stays in the history books for ever. In five years' time no one will remember who Sao Paulo beat in the Final."
Liverpool defender Sami Hyypia

"It was heroic – a team made in Brazil imposed themselves against Liverpool who are, in reality, a European Select."
Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira (below)

Paris blues…Laurent Fournier paid the price of his president's fear of missing out on the Champions League

Fournier chopped by PSG

FRANCE

NO MATTER THE reality of their situation, big-city clubs always have big-city aspirations. That was underlined on December 27 when Pierre Blayau, president of perennial underachievers Paris Saint-Germain, sacked coach Laurent Fournier, who had been in the position only since February.

On the day the former PSG player was given his marching orders the club were sixth in Ligue 1, yet just a point behind Lens and Auxerre in joint second place after 19 games, the halfway point of the season.

With the title apparently out of reach – Gerard Houllier's Lyon were 12 points clear going into the Christmas holiday – a second-place finish was the best possible outcome for any of the chasing pack. But Blayau explained that automatic entry to the Champions League, by finishing second, was an absolute must for his club this season, and on appointing former Sochaux boss Guy Lacombe as his new coach, remarked that "in the two weeks before the winter break we played like a team that was going to finish eighth rather than second".

Nevertheless, the sacking of the popular Fournier appeared harsh and also ridiculously impetuous to outsiders. True, a 1-1 draw away to struggling Ajaccio in the final League game before Christmas did little for Fournier's reputation, nor did a 2-0 loss to underachieving Toulouse in the League Cup. But surely it was counter-productive to fire him, risking the destabilisation of a notoriously volatile squad who were firmly behind the coach.

Once the deed had been done, there was little doubt the grey-haired, moustachioed Lacombe would take up the reins. The 50-year-old had been twiddling his thumbs since parting company with Sochaux last summer, filling time as a pundit for satellite sports channel Canal Plus. The only other coach even tenuously linked with the position was former Lyon boss Paul Le Guen, who showed next to no interest in picking up the poisoned chalice.

Cold reception

Lacombe took a first look at his new players at a three-day training camp at Marcoussis, the centre normally used by the French rugby union team. The weather was particularly Siberian on his first day in charge, and the reception reserved for him by a vocal contingent of PSG supporters, who shouted Fournier's name, was equally cold.

There were threats of bigger protests at PSG's first match under Lacombe, at home to Sochaux, on January 4. But the new man is battle-hardened enough to take such stuff in his stride, and the 3-1 win against his old club will have boosted his resilience.

Lacombe had a 20-year playing career as a combative midfielder and has 10 years' experience as a top-flight coach – he has also led Cannes, Toulouse and Guingamp. "I had to deal with the same sort of stuff at Sochaux," he said after his frosty reception. "Maybe it's a good omen."

Certainly, the Sochaux boo-boys did not distract Lacombe from his task there. The club qualified for Europe in each of his first two seasons in charge and also won the League Cup in 2004, Sochaux's first trophy since 1938. But last season's disappointing 10th-place finish ended his reign.

Of course, the resources at Lacombe's disposal in the capital – in terms of both finance and his squad – bear no comparison with his previous situation. All the same, nobody seems to be jumping up and down with outright excitement about the potential of this new partnership.

Lacombe knows only too well what is expected of him, but heaven only knows what Blayau will do at the end of the season if his man fails to deliver that guaranteed Champions League qualification.

"I couldn't turn down Paris because I've never had a group of players like this to work with," said Lacombe, PSG's eighth coach since they last won the championship in 1994. "You're under the media spotlight here and that brings its own pressures. But you can afford to worry only about what happens on the pitch. The actors are out there on the turf, and that's where I have to do my stuff."

Howard Johnson

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Moving and shaking…the Moretto deal took some sinister turns

Things turn ugly but Benfica get their man

PORTUGAL

BENFICA'S SIGNING of Brazilian goalkeeper Moretto from Vitoria Setubal made the headlines for all the wrong reasons, the deal panning out like something from a gangster movie.

Scene 1) Moretto, on holiday in Brazil, signs a contract agreement with an independent agency, which sets up a deal for him to join FC Porto.

2) At the same time, Setubal president Chumbita Nunes agrees to sell the player to Benfica.

3) Benfica president Luis Filipe Vieira goes to Brazil to pick up his new signing, but is confronted at the airport by a representative of the agency with which Moretto signed.

4) The agent implies Vieira and the player may well come to physical harm if they confirm the Benfica deal once back in Portugal. They all board the same plane to Lisbon and, during the flight, the agent attempts to pressure Moretto into honouring the contract he signed with the agency.

5) Wanting to resolve the issue immediately on arrival, Vieira contacts a group of thugs, who make their way to the airport to intimidate the agent and, after a heated discussion, slap his face in front of reporters.

6) Later the same day, Moretto is unveiled at the Stadium of Light as Benfica's new signing. The goalkeeper confesses he had been tempted to go to Porto, but declares his love for the defending champions.

7) Porto deny any involvement with an independent agent in the Moretto deal and claim they never tried to divert the player to Dragao.

Laurent Robert's transfer to Benfica was much more conventional. Newcastle's French winger, who had been on loan at Portsmouth since the summer, signed a three-and-a-half-year deal.

There have been a couple of other notable signings over the New Year. Sporting Lisbon brought in national team defender Marco Caneira on loan from Valencia until the end of the season, while League leaders Porto confirmed the arrival of Brazilian forward Anderson, voted best player at last year's Under-17 World Championship in Peru.

Pedro Pinto

SWITZERLAND

Basle's home record finally goes

Basle surrendered their three-year unbeaten home record in domestic competition when going down 4-3 to holders Zurich in the fifth round of the Cup. Coach Christian Gross was philosophical, saying: "The Cup always brings surprises. It was a closely-fought game and could have gone either way. It was just not our day."

A few days earlier, Basle had rounded off the autumn League campaign in style when beating Young Boys 6-1 away to maintain their eight-point lead at the top.

Zurich remained second after winning 3-0 at home to Aarau, who slipped to the bottom of the table. That cost coach Andy Egli his job and he was replaced by former Neuchatel Xamax boss Alain Geiger.

Third-placed Grasshopper have agreed to release coach Hanspeter Latour from his contract after an approach from struggling Bundesliga side Koln, who recently sacked Uwe Rapolder. Latour joined Grasshopper from Thun last season and steered the club to third place in the League. However, Grasshopper finished bottom of their UEFA Cup group this season, prompting Latour to publicly criticise a number of his players.

Ivar von Rulach

AUSTRIA

Hickersberger back at helm

Josef Hickersberger has been reappointed as national team coach, quitting his job with champions Rapid Wien to take up the position, 16 years after being sacked following a humiliating 1-0 defeat by the Faroe Islands in a Euro 92 qualifier. The 57-year-old replaces Hans Krankl, fired after Austria's failure to reach the World Cup, and must now build a side capable of competing well at the Euro 2008 finals, which Austria will co-host with Switzerland.

"Finding the right XI for the European Championship has top priority," said Hickersberger, who went against public opinion when adding: "Hans Krankl did a good job, and I will profit from that. Austria will have a good team in 2008."

The new boss has already earmarked six core members of his

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future squad, saying: "We have two players in the English Premier League and four in the German Bundesliga, all of whom are young enough to star in our Euro 2008 squad." The six are Paul Scharner (recently signed by Wigan from Brann Bergen), Emanuel Pogatetz (Middlesbrough), Jurgen Macho (Kaiserslautern), Martin Stranzl (Stuttgart), Stefan Lexa and Markus Weissenberger (both Eintracht Frankfurt).

Hickersberger's first spell in charge of Austria lasted for three years – from 1987 to 1990 – including an appearance at Italia 90. After his sacking he coached Bahrain and also had spells at a number of club sides, including Fortuna Dusseldorf, Austria Wien and several Middle East clubs, before taking the reins at Rapid in 2002.

Harry Miltner

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Shelbourne facing northern exposure

Shelbourne, losing finalists in the inaugural Setanta Cup competition last May, will have to cross the border three times during the group stage of this year's tournament.

The Dublin club have been drawn with Belfast sides Linfield – their conquerers in last year's Final – and Irish League champions Glentoran, as well as Derry City, who play in the Republic's Eircom League but are based north of the border.

The competition, which gets under way on February 20, has been expanded from six to eight clubs this year. In the other group, Eircom League champions Cork City meet FAI Cup winners Drogheda United, and Dungannon Swifts and Portadown from the North. The top two from each group qualify for the semi-finals.

Sean Creedon

LIECHTENSTEIN

Noventa returns to Vaduz

Leading club Vaduz have appointed former player Adi Noventa as their new director of football. The 55-year-old started his playing career with Vaduz before successful spells at Swiss clubs Grasshopper, Lucerne and Young Boys. Noventa has since coached Swiss side Winterthur.

Vaduz, however, look set to miss out once again on promotion to the Swiss top flight after a dreadful end to their autumn League campaign.

National coach Martin Andermatt has been handed an extension to his contract until 2007.

Graeme Crawford

Rene takes reins

BELGIUM

BELGIUM HAVE PINNED their faith in former national team midfielder Rene Vandereycken to revive the side's fortunes after their failure to qualify for the World Cup and Euro 2004, appointing him coach on a two-and-a-half-year contract.

Vandereycken, who won 50 caps between 1975 and 1986, is much admired as a motivator of players and widely considered to be the country's finest tactician. The 52-year-old showed his abilities when leading Genk to a highly respectable third place in the League last season. However, Vandereycken is a stickler for doing things the right way, and his lack of flexibility is believed to have been a major reason for his dismissal by Genk in the summer, despite the upcoming UEFA Cup campaign.

Vandereycken, who says he wants Belgium to return to their traditional counter-attacking style, previously coached Standard Liege, Anderlecht, Mainz of Germany and Dutch side Twente, among others.

He succeeds Aime Anthuenis, who has returned to club football, taking the reins at Lokeren for a third time. The 62-year-old replaces Lokomotiv Moscow-bound Slavoljub Muslin on an 18-month contract.

League leaders Standard Liege beat second-placed Anderlecht 2-0 to secure the "winter champions" spot for the first time since 1982-83, when they last captured the title. They have signed FC Porto and former Portugal defender Jorge Costa to replace Kaiserslautern-bound Mathieu Beda.

Nicholas Harling

Tactical nous…Rene Vandereycken

Feyenoord blow hot and cold

HOLLAND

FEYENOORD SHOWED wildly inconsistent form during December, leaving their demanding fans none the wiser about whether the team have the capability to end the 13-year wait for a League title.

The Rotterdammers showed their potential by beating championship rivals PSV Eindhoven 1-0 and AZ Alkmaar 2-0 but remained a point behind PSV going into the new year after managing only a 2-2 draw at unfashionable RBC Roosendaal and losing 2-1 at Den Haag. Feyenoord also exited the Cup after losing 1-0 at Roda JC.

Coach Erwin Koeman has played down his side's chances of winning the League, saying: "We're good, but not good enough yet."

The signing of defender Ron Vlaar from AZ could make a significant difference. The 20-year-old, at odds with AZ coach Louis Van Gaal after refusing to sign a new contract, was merely being used as a reserve. This prompted interest from Ajax, but AZ chairman Dirk Scheringa vetoed a move to Amsterdam since he still feels betrayed by their signing of director Martin Van Geel last summer. A deal with Tottenham then fell through, leaving the way clear for Feyenoord.

Ajax responded by breaking the domestic transfer record when signing Heerenveen striker Klaas Jan Huntelaar, the League top scorer with 17 goals, for £6.2million.

Meanwhile, Nigel De Jong will join the Ajax exodus at the end of the season, saying he needs a new challenge. Maxwell, Stephen Pienaar and Hatem Trabelsi had already stated their intention to leave. Pienaar will join Borussia Dortmund, who have already brought Vitesse's Matthew Amoah on board.

Coach Cees Lok dramatically quit NEC Nijmegen after announcing at the club's Christmas party that he had insurmountable differences with the board. His decision was all the more unexpected because NEC were a more-than-respectable fifth in the League. Shortly afterwards, Lok took the reins at NAC Breda, whom predecessor Ton Lokhoff left with the club perched just above the drop zone.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

No go…Feyenoord's Bahia and Paauwe crowd out Robert during the win over PSV

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Scramble for Larsson

SWEDEN

HENRIK LARSSON'S decision to return to Sweden from Barcelona in the summer will almost certainly spark a tug of war among local clubs. The national team forward is from the south of the country and will no doubt be courted by former club Helsingborgs, but Malmo and Halmstads, two other southern clubs, are also likely suitors.

Larsson, 34, has said he will announce his new club only after the World Cup but has already played down talk of a move to Danish side Brondby.

He said: "Brondby are a fine club, but while it would be possible to live in Sweden and play in Copenhagen travelling to training could get a little bit tiresome."

Brondby, though, is the destination for Malmo's Cameroonian left-back Joseph Elanga, while the Swedish club have bought Icelandic winger Emil Halfredsson from Tottenham. Malmo have also decided to retain Finnish veteran Jari Litmanen, at least for their pre-season tour of South Africa.

IFK Gothenburg have been ordered to pay nearly £1million in taxes relating to the transfers of Peter Ijeh in 2003 and Stefan Selakovic a year later.

Pentti Hietanen

Thinking of home…Henrik Larsson will exchange Barcelona's kit for that of a club in his native Sweden in the summer

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DENMARK

Bech races to fifth club

Troels Bech has taken charge of his fifth club at the age of just 39 after being handed the reins by struggling Esbjerg. The bright, brash coach has no illusions about the new job, however, saying his priority is just to keep the club in the top flight. He replaces the much-liked Ove Pedersen, shown the door after Esbjerg finished seventh out of 12 in the autumn campaign, having taken only 23 points from 20 games.

Bech, viewed by many as arrogant, has always talked a good game during his previous coaching roles – at Horsens, Ikast, OB (two spells) and Midtjylland. But the former Silkeborg player, who has a degree in Italian, has also delivered, leading OB to Cup triumph in 2002 and Midtjylland to the Final the following year.

The biggest transfer interest at New Year surrounded Brondby's international defender Daniel Agger. He was being strongly linked with a move to Liverpool, with a fee of £5.5million mentioned, although Bayern Munich and Juventus were also keeping a watchful eye.

Jim Holden

FINLAND

Bribery claims hit home

The domestic game, already rocked by the Allianssi scandal, has now been hit by match-fixing claims. A leading tabloid newspaper published an interview with a so far unidentified player, who said he had accepted bribes to lose a match. The interview suggested this is not uncommon in the Finnish game.

The claims have damaged the game's already battered reputation in the country. In the future, any player committing a blunder or any quirky result will be viewed with suspicion. Meanwhile, the government has hinted that if football cannot put its house in order, it will dramatically reduce its annual grant, and a number of private sponsors have withdrawn their backing from the League.

Pentti Hietanen

ICELAND

Bjarni brought in

Breidablik coach Bjarni Johannsson has been appointed assistant to new national team boss Eyjolfur Sverrisson. Johannsson will retain his position at his club, whom he guided to the top flight last season as Second Division champions.

Forward Errol Edderson McFarlane, one of Johannsson's charges at Breidablik, is in the running for a place at the World Cup finals after being included in a recent Trinidad & Tobago training camp.

Rab Christie

ESTONIA

Poom stays with Gunners

National team keeper Mart Poom has extended his loan spell with Arsenal from Sunderland until the end of the season, having originally joined the Gunners for three months in August.

Forward Ingemar Teever has joined Sweden's Osters from champions TVMK, who have also said goodbye to coach Sergei Ratnikov, now with Tammeka Tartu.

Andres Must

LATVIA

FA puts six in fixing frame

The FA claims it knows the identity of six people who have attempted to fix top division matches following a seven-month investigation.

"There are referees as well as players and club staff," said FA president Guntis Indriksons. "We also have facts about agreements between coaches. But we will not reveal any names now, while the investigation is still going on."

Grasshopper defender Igors Stepanovs has been voted Latvian Player of the Year.

Andres Must

WALES

TNS go further clear

Unbeaten Total Network Solutions, the defending champions, stretched their lead to 12 points after taking four points from Welshpool in their two derby meetings over the holiday while closest challengers Port Talbot lost twice to Llanelli. Rhyl climbed into second spot after winning both meetings with Connah's Quay Nomads, who were on the back of a four-match winning run that had lifted them off the bottom of the table, having failed to win any of their first 11 games.

Mel Thomas

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ferguson fires Linfield

Runaway League leaders Linfield underlined their superiority when beating closest challengers Glentoran 3-0 in the League Cup Final on December 10 and then 4-1 away in their traditional Boxing Day League meeting. Thirty-six-year-old Glenn Ferguson scored all the goals in the League Cup triumph, hit another hat-trick the following week in an 8-1 demolition of struggling Larne and twice more at Glentoran, the defending champions. Ferguson then converted two penalties in Linfield's 5-0 win at Glenavon that gave them a 15-point lead. The Belfast side were still unbeaten after 16 games and had dropped only two points.

Roy Kitson

New recruit…Karim Essediri

Rosenborg start again

NORWAY

ROSENBORG HAVE BEGUN rebuilding their squad following their failure to win the championship for the first time in 14 years. Forward Alexander Odegaard has been offloaded to Viking having failed to make an impact at the Trondheim club, while midfielder Fredrik Winsnes has also departed, to Denmark's AaB Aalborg.

Tunisian winger Karim Essediri has been brought in from Tromso, who have appointed former Aalesund boss Ivar Morten Normark as their new coach. He replaces Steinar Nilsen, who will continue as sports director.

Molde also have a new coach in former player Arild Stavrum, replacing Bo Johansson, while Brann have sold Austria midfielder or defender Paul Scharner – their best player last season – to Wigan.

Sigurd Odegaard

Down and up…Keane is disconsolate as Clyde's O'Donnell celebrates

Celtic humbled on Keane's debut

SCOTLAND

ROY KEANE had an ignominious debut for Celtic as they lost 2-1 at second level Clyde in the third round of the Cup. The former Manchester United captain played the whole game for his new side, the Cup holders, but could not prevent the upset. Clyde took a two-goal first-half lead, with Gordon Strachan's side scoring only six minutes from full-time.

A week earlier, Celtic had taken a big step towards regaining the League title when beating closest challengers Hearts 3-2 at Tynecastle. The visitors were 2-0 down after just eight minutes but two late goals from Stephen McManus after a 55th-minute strike by substitute Stephen Pearson secured the win, which put Celtic seven points clear.

Pearson had been on the field only five minutes when he scored. McManus struck in the 87th and 90th minutes after Hearts had Greek defender Takis Fissas sent off.

Champions Rangers have continued to falter, falling 17 points behind Celtic after a 3-3 draw with lowly Dunfermline on Boxing Day.

Alan Fairley

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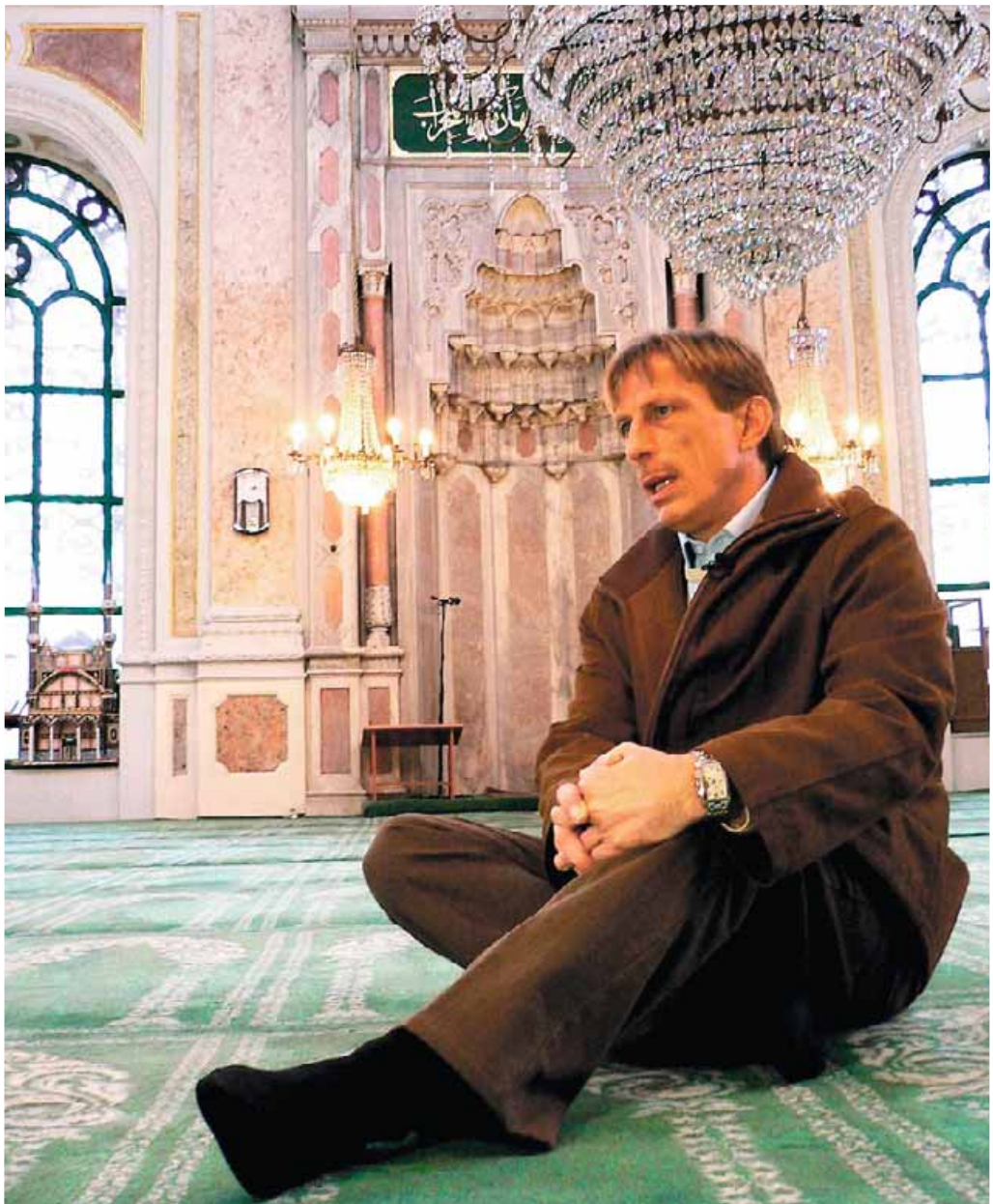
Daum leads the charge

TURKEY



Feeling at home....Daum holds court in the Ortakoy mosque in Istanbul during an interview for Fenerbahce's website

ONLY A FEW seasons ago Fenerbahce fans were complaining that the team had gone to the dogs, while the administration were changing coaches with increasing desperation in their search for success. But now, after taking a record 45 points from the first half of the season (17 games), the club are on course to win their third consecutive League title.

The only disappointment of the autumn was Fener's poor display in the Champions League, when they finished bottom of their group.

Much of the credit for the club's domestic success in recent years must go to German coach Christoph Daum, who has managed to keep the team on track despite reported player revolts and his own battle with a critical media, while at the same time keeping the club board onside. So Fenerbahce fans must have given a sigh of relief when Bundesliga side Schalke appointed Mirko Slomka to their vacant coaching position, to which Daum had been linked.

There is a far less rosy picture at arch-rivals Galatasaray, four points behind Fener at the winter break and who are struggling with a mass of financial problems. The players threatened to boycott a mid-season training camp in Antalya in protest at non-payment of wages. Only the intervention of chairman Ozhan Canaydin persuaded them to attend.

But Serb midfielder Sasa Ilic and Croat defender Stjepan Tomas did not travel to Antalya amid rumours that they are in transfer talks and will quit the club unless they are paid in full.

Suna Erdem

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

Petkovic: 'We'll survive Group of Death'

National coach Ilija Petkovic admitted that the World Cup draw had pooled his side with exactly the teams he had wished to avoid – Argentina, Holland and Ivory Coast – but still expressed confidence that a place in the last 16 was a realistic prospect. "Somehow we will come out of the Group of Death – alive," he predicted.

Walter Zenga's Red Star Belgrade blew their chance of reaching the UEFA Cup knockout stages by conceding two late goals to draw 2-2 at Strasbourg when needing a win to go through. At least Red Star went into the winter break three points clear of champions Partizan at the top of the League and had reached the domestic Cup semi-finals.

National team defender Nemanja Vidic has joined Manchester United from Spartak Moscow.

Vladimir Novak

SLOVENIA

Oblak OK with federation

National coach Brane Oblak has received the federation's backing despite Slovenia winning just one game during 2005, during which they failed to qualify for the World Cup finals. "There is no reason for change," said president Rudi Zavrl. "We will show our strength in the qualifiers for Euro 2008 because we have some excellent young players."

Zavrl's assessment was supported by the choice of 21-year-old Dalibor Stevanovic as the country's Player of the Year. The midfielder's form for League leaders Domzale has earned him a move to La Liga with Real

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Sociedad. HIT Gorica forward Miran Burgic, 21, is another in the running to become a national team fixture.

Zdravko Reic

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Siroki strengthen Brazilian blend

League leaders Siroki Brijeg have taken their tally of Brazilians to six after signing teenagers Celson de Jesus and Alexandro Dos Santos, and 22-year-old Wagner Lopez de Oliveira. Roniele Faria Gomes, Wagner Santos Lago and Renato Gomides have all been with the club since the start of the season. Siroki also have five Croats in the squad, plus Ghanaian William Etshu Tabi.

The club led by three points from Modrica and Sarajevo after 15 games, the season's halfway point.

Zdravko Reic

MACEDONIA

Ignatov is No 1

Stojance Ignatov has been named Player of the Year after captaining Rabotnicki Kometal to their first League title. The 26-year-old midfielder has also been to the fore in the current campaign, with Rabotnicki again leading the way.

Former national team coach Dragan Kanatlarovski has taken charge of second-placed Vardar Skopje until the end of the season, with the option of a two-year extension. He replaces Vujadin Stanojkovic, a former assistant to Kanatlarovski in the national team set-up, who was sacked after his side failed to narrow the gap on Rabotnicki before the winter break.

Kanatlarovski had a six-month spell at Vardar eight years ago.

Meanwhile, 11 Vardar players have each been fined £1,400 after refusing to play in the Cup quarter-final against Bregalnica Stip in protest at unpaid wages and bonuses.

Bregalnica, who won the tie 3-1 on aggregate, also have a new coach in Kiril Dojcinovski. He replaces Bulgarian Nikola Spasov, who resigned for personal reasons.

Serb Josip Pirmaer has taken charge of Sileks after compatriot Nebojsa Petrovic quit.

Michel Stojmanovski

CYPRUS

Omonia land Rink

Omonia won the battle to secure the services of former Germany forward Paulo Rink, seeing off the challenge of the two other main championship contenders, Apollon and APOEL. Brazil-born Rink became hot property after scoring 10 goals in 11 games for mid-table Olympiakos during the autumn campaign.

Omonia also have a new coach, Ioan Andone, who recently parted company with Romanian League leaders Dinamo Bucharest.

Anorthosis have signed midfielder Costas Kiassos from Greek side Panionios, with Leonidas Kabadais moving in the opposite direction.

Pole Jerzy Engel, APOEL's new coach, has signed two compatriot players – midfielder Jaroslaw Popiela and keeper Andrzej Krystalowicz. Popiela replaces Daniel Kennedy, now at Ergotelis. APOEL have also welcomed back captain Marinos Satsias, who had been sidelined by injury since the summer.

Soulis Theodosiou

MALTA

Hibernians enjoy festive cheer

Joint League leaders Hibernians ended the year on a high note by winning the traditional Christmas tournament for four of the country's leading clubs. The Paolites beat Birkirkara on penalties in the Final after a 1-1 draw to lift the trophy for the first time since it was introduced in 1990-91.

Hibernians beat defending champions and current co-leaders Sliema Wanderers 2-1 in the semi-finals, while Birkirkara saw off Valletta 4-2 on penalties.

The previous season's League top four compete for the trophy.

Bottom-of-the-table Mosta have appointed Charles Agius as coach. He replaces Paul Zammit, now in charge of Valletta.

Domenico Aquilina

Prso makes it three in a row

CROATIA

DADO PRSO has been named Player of the Year for the third successive season. The Rangers and national team forward won the award, decided by a panel of 11 former internationals, for his contribution to Croatia's automatic qualification for the World Cup. Only Davor Suker has won the award more times (six).

League leaders Dinamo have further strengthened their squad, signing Croatian Under-21 star Ognjen Vukojevic from Lierse of Belgium and Brazilian Costa Anderson from Vasco da Gama. The Zagreb side are eight points ahead of closest challengers Rijeka and 22 in front of arch-rivals Hajduk Split, the defending champions.

Zdravko Reic

Striking success…Dado Prso spearheaded Croatia's charge to the World Cup finals

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Pondering retirement…Zagorakis

Job lined up for Zagorakis

GREECE

GREECE CAPTAIN Theo Zagorakis has been promised a position in the national team managerial set-up when he decides to retire as a player. "He will decide on everything, from the team's strips to their opponents – in co-operation with the coach, Otto Rehhagel, of course," said federation chief Vassilis Gagatsis.

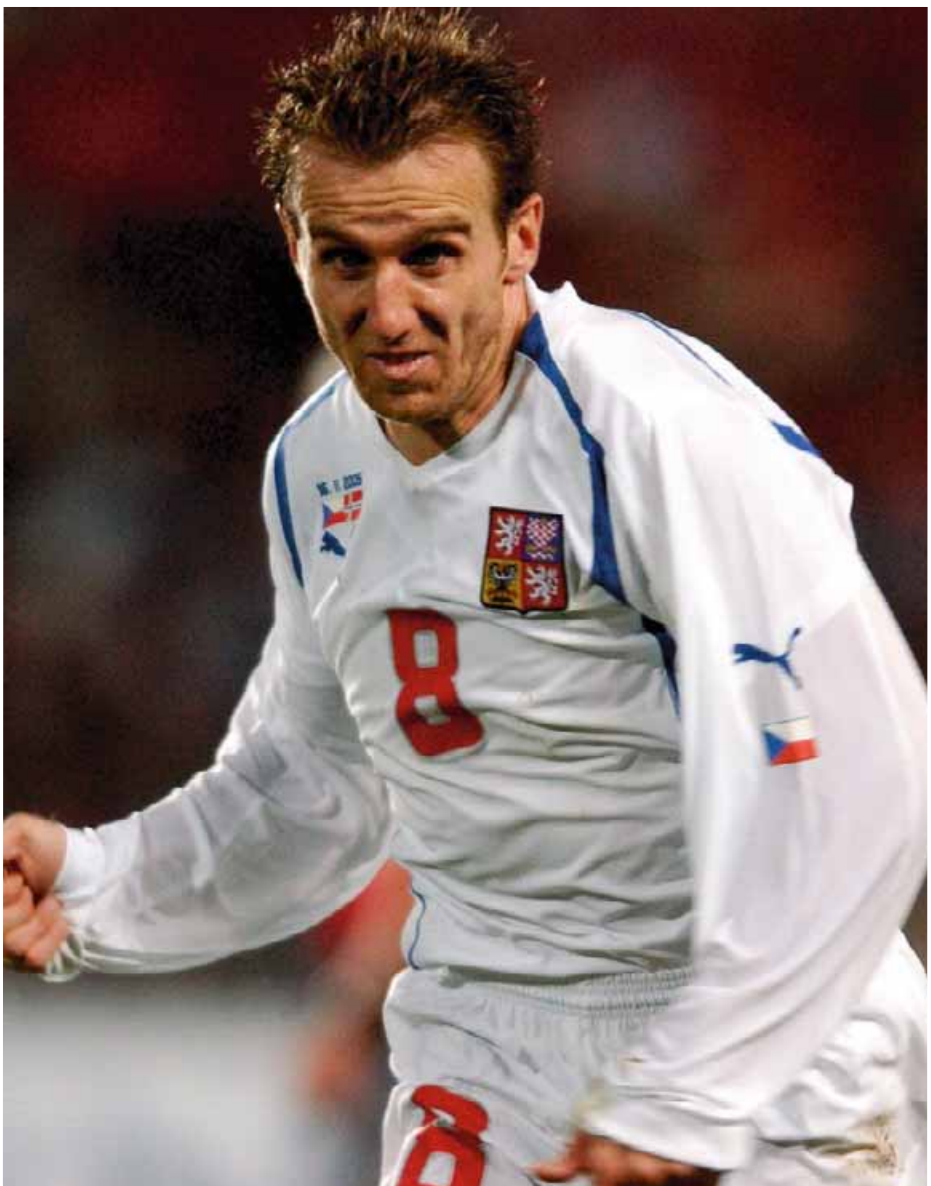
Although Zagorakis, 34, has already talked of hanging up his boots, Gagatsis believes it may not be for a few years yet, saying: "I think he has enough spirit to keep him going until the age of 40."

The PAOK Salonika midfielder, who was voted best player at Euro 2004, has 110 caps.

Gagatsis, meanwhile, expressed his relief at the recent two-year extension deal signed by Rehhagel and admitted that had the German quit, he would have opted for another foreign coach as his successor. "I'd asked many people to name one Greek who could fill the position, and got no answers," said Gagatsis.

Lou Economopoulos

Poborsky stays in Second Division



Still aiming high…Poborsky is confident his World Cup chances will not be affected by playing in a lower division

CZECH REPUBLIC

KAREL POBORSKY will play Second Division football for the rest of the season following the cancellation of his contract with champions Sparta Prague, but he is confident that the situation will not damage his chances of playing at the World Cup.

A dispute in September between the 33-year-old – the most-capped Czech player of all time – and Sparta's then coach, Jaroslav Hrebik, led to Poborsky being loaned to Second Division Ceske Budejovice. The loan period ended on December 31, but Poborsky has opted to remain at Budejovice – a club he partly owns – rather than return to Prague and see out his contract, which had been due to expire in June this year.

Sparta have agreed to pay Poborsky £120,000 of the £285,000 due to him under their original deal, which had made him the League's best-paid player.

The midfielder discussed the move with national team coach Karel Bruckner, later saying: "He told me he doesn't know why being at Budejovice, aged 33, I'd forget how to play football."

Current Sparta coach Stanislav Griga has begun rebuilding his team after a poor autumn campaign, during which they slipped to ninth in the domestic League and finished bottom of their Champions League group.

Griga, a Slovak, had agreed deals with three of his compatriots as the transfer window opened – defenders Radoslav Zabavnik (from CSKA Sofia) and Michal Hanek (Dinamo Moscow), and young midfielder Tomas Kona (Nitra). Meanwhile, Sparta playmaker Lukas Zelenka has joined Manisaspor, becoming the highest-profile member of a growing band of Czech players to move to Turkey.

Sam Beckwith

UKRAINE

Bid hit by building plans

The country's joint bid with Poland to host Euro 2012 has been dealt a major blow after the Ukrainian federation failed to scupper a developer's plans to build a trade and entertainment complex right next door to Kiev's Olympiyskyi stadium, the proposed venue for the Final.

One of the walls of the new complex would be only six metres from the stadium's main entrance, raising major access and safety concerns, while having two large venues in such close proximity would put a big burden on local infrastructure. The Olympiyskyi's capacity of 83,000 had already been reduced to 60,000 by FIFA for safety reasons.

Federation president Hryhorii Surkis has written to state president Viktor Yushchenko pointing out that the building plans threaten Ukraine's chances of winning the bid.

Milan's Andrii Shevchenko has been voted Ukrainian Player of the Year for the sixth time. Shakhtar Donetsk midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk was second.

Anatoliy Demyanenko, who took the coaching reins at Dynamo in a caretaker capacity following the sacking of Leonid Buriak in August, will remain in the post until the end of the season.

Former USSR forward Oleg Protasov has taken charge of Dnipro, quitting his post at Steaua Bucharest to take up the position. Tavriya have appointed former Dynamo and Metalist boss Mikhail Fomenko as the successor to Oleh Fedorchuk.

Oleg Zadernovsky

POLAND

Amica and Lech cook up merger

Amica Wronki and Lech Poznan, fourth and fifth respectively in the top division at the winter break, are to merge in the summer. Lech, five times champions, have been in serious financial trouble for years and the move was seen as a last chance to save the club from bankruptcy. Amica, the name of the Wronki club's biggest backer, is Poland's largest producer of kitchen equipment and sees the investment in Lech as a way of raising the company's profile: Lech are the most popular side in the region – Poznan is 60km from Wronki – and the merged club could also help promote Amica's products abroad should they gain entry to European competition.

Both teams will continue as separate entities until the end of this

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season, when Amica will drop into the Third Division for next term, to effectively become a reserve side for Lech. Amica's best players will join the top division side.

Former Romanian international Dan Petrescu has taken charge of League leaders Wisla Krakow after quitting Sportul Studentesc in his homeland. Tomasz Kulawik had held the Wisla reins in a caretaker capacity since Jerzy Engel's dismissal in October.

Borussia Dortmund forward Ebi Smolarek was voted Polish Footballer of the Year by *Pilka Nozna* magazine.

Dariusz Kurowski

HUNGARY

Lothar in limbo

Lothar Matthaus' future as national coach was uncertain after his contract expired without agreement being reached on a new deal before he departed for a New Year skiing holiday.

The German clearly wants to remain in the position and believes his record – 11 wins and three draws in 28 matches – is reasonable, even though the team finished only fourth in their World Cup qualifying group. "My players were too naive in crucial situations," Matthaus acknowledged. "We have to follow the French example of building up a new young generation of players. Where was French football in the early 1990s? Nowhere. Then they won the World Cup eight years later."

However, the German's previous deal involved a big financial outlay for the FA, who need results since it is now 20 years since Hungary played at a major finals.

Peterjon Cresswell

MOLDOVA

Pasulko gets the push

Viktor Pasulko's four-year reign as national coach has ended, the FA announcing that his contract would not be extended. "Pasulko gave us all he could," said president Pavel Ciobanu. "The national team played well in the Euro 2004 qualifiers, but our last qualifying campaign, for the World Cup, was not so successful and we were last in our group."

Serif Tiraspol have signed Benin striker Razak Omotoyossi, one of the best players at last year's World Youth Cup.

National team midfielder Serghei Covaliciuc has earned his third successive Player of the Year award. The 23-year-old plays his club football for Spartak Moscow.

Miron Goihman

BELARUS

Bye-bye Baidachnyi

National coach Anatoliy Baidachnyi has been fired after the team's poor showing in the World Cup qualifiers. Belarus finished second bottom of Group 5, eight points off even the play-off spot. Assistant Yuriy Kurnenin has taken the reins temporarily.

Meanwhile, midfielder Valentin Bialkevich has announced his international retirement at the age of 32 in order to concentrate on his club career with Kyiv Dynamo.

Former Belarus coach Sergey Borovskyi has been appointed to lead Dinamo Brest following the dismissal of Mikhail Markhel.

Arsenal midfielder Alexander Hleb has been voted Player of the Year for the third time in a poll of more than 300 journalists, players, coaches and referees. The 24-year-old previously won in 2002 and 2003. Midfielder Denis Kovba (Kryliya Sovetov) and forward Vitaliy Kutuzov (Sampdoria) finished second and third respectively.

Oleg Zadernovsky

Brazilian is best

RUSSIA

DANIEL CARVALHO became the first foreigner to be named Russia's Footballer of the Year when topping the poll of journalists. The 22-year-old Brazilian midfielder was a key figure for CSKA Moscow as they won the UEFA Cup and recaptured the domestic League title.

Zenit St Petersburg forward Andrei Arshavin came second, with CSKA goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev third.

CSKA have increased their Brazilian contingent to four by signing 18-year-old Corinthians striker Jo in a five-year deal. Forward Vagner Love and midfielder Dudu are the other two members of the quartet.

League runners-up Spartak Moscow are in search of a new defensive pivot after selling Serbo-Montenegrin Nemanja Vidic to Manchester United. The 24-year-old had been at Spartak for 18 months.

Serb Slavoljub Muslin has replaced Vladimir Eshtrekov as coach of Lokomotiv Moscow, the 2004 champions, after they finished only third last term to miss out on next season's Champions League. Muslin was most recently in charge of Lokeren in Belgium.

Victor Gusev

Ideal import…Carvalho was a key player for CSKA last year

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Failure in Europe…Ioan Andone

Andone falls from the top

ROMANIA

DINAMO BUCHAREST boss Ioan Andone became the second coach in 2005 to part company with his club when leading the table, following in the footsteps of Walter Zenga at Steaua Bucharest in June.

Andone, who won the national Cup in each of his three years at the club, quit after coming under pressure following his failure to guide Dinamo through the UEFA Cup group stage. "It's time for Dinamo to make their international breakthrough; we need to do more than just dominate domestic soccer," said executive president Ioan Becali.

Andone has joined Cypriot side Omonia until the end of the season, with the option of a two-year extension.

Steaua have appointed their third coach in six months after Igor Protasov, Zenga's successor, quit to take charge of former side Dnipro in his native Ukraine. Cosmin Olaroiu is back at the helm after three years, and his first act was to block the sale of striker Daniel Oprita to Poli Timisoara.

Dan Petrescu has made good his threat to quit Romanian football, leaving Sportul Studentesc to take charge of Polish champions Wisla Krakow. The former Chelsea and Romania defender claimed that the recent re-election of federation president Mircea Sandu meant there was no hope of the domestic game cleaning up its act. Petrescu has persistently accused Sandu of failing to stop rising corruption during his 15-year reign.

Radu Timofte

Hero of the hour…keeper Roberto Abbondanzieri celebrates scoring Boca's winning penalty in the Sudamericana Cup Final

Boca double up as Gimnasia blow it

ARGENTINA

SURPRISE CHALLENGERS Gimnasia y Esgrima de La Plata threw away their chance to win the opening championship after only drawing their last two games. It allowed Boca Juniors to overtake them, and Alfio Basile's side completed a notable double by winning the Sudamericana Cup.

Gimnasia went into their penultimate game, at home to Newell's Old Boys, a point clear of Boca, but their own hooligan fans played a large part in the team's downfall.

Newell's, in the bottom half of the table, had nothing to play for and the players were barely in the mood for the contest after a row over late payment of wages. But that all changed when the team bus was attacked by Gimnasia fans on arriving at the ground.

Newell's coach Nery Pumpido rallied his players, telling them to take their revenge on the pitch, and they turned in a spirited performance that kept the game scoreless. The hooligans ensured Newell's were still in the same mood for the second half by throwing fireworks through their dressing-room window at half-time.

Meanwhile, Boca beat Independiente 2-0 at home to go top and made sure of the title with a 2-1 win at Olimpo on the last day as Gimnasia were held again, 1-1 at Banfield.

The La Plata side have now also lost their best player, young playmaker Lucas Lobos, to Spanish club Cadiz.

Four days after securing the title, Boca won the Sudamericana trophy on penalties against Mexican side Pumas UNAM. Both legs were 1-1 draws, but Boca held their nerve in the shoot-out, winning it 4-3. Goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri was the hero, saving two spot-kicks then scoring the winning penalty himself.

Boca's Double – secured after playing four hard games in just 12 days – was all the more notable because it was achieved with a virtually unchanged line-up. "We made a mockery of the common belief that you cannot play two tournaments with the same team," said Basile.

River Plate, Boca's arch-rivals, had one of their worst years, finishing only sixth in the opening championship and 10th in the 2004-05 closing campaign. Coach Reinaldo Merlo quit, citing a lack of support from his players, with ex-Argentina boss Daniel Passarella returning to the helm.

River are now desperate for Libertadores Cup success to restore some pride but, thanks to Boca, face a tougher task in their preliminary round tie against Bolivia's Oriente Petrolero. Boca did not qualify for this year's tournament but are doing all they can to ensure River do not go any further by loaning Oriente four first-team players for three weeks, covering both legs of the River clash.

Eric Weil

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PARAGUAY

Cerro outright winners again

For the second year in a row, Cerro Porteno won the championship without the need for an end-of-season play-off by winning both the opening and closing titles.

The feat was especially notable since they sold their two leading strikers during the course of the year – Santiago Salcedo, top scorer in this year's Libertadores Cup with eight goals, joined FC Tokyo, while Cesar Ramirez was sold to Brazil's Flamengo and helped them escape relegation.

But playmaker Julio Dos Santos was there throughout, and the 22-year-old's superb performances also earned him a national team call-up and attracted the attention of European clubs.

Another key figure was 24-year-old Jorge Achucarro, who at the start of the year was set to be loaned to Bolivian club Blooming against his will but who stayed on and won his chance following the departure of Ramirez and Salcedo.

Credit is also due to Argentinian coach Gustavo Costas, who led Alianza Lima to the Peruvian title last year before taking the reins at Cerro.

The key game in the closing championship was Cerro's derby with arch-rivals Olimpia in the penultimate round. Olimpia, the hosts, had enjoyed a mini-revival under Carlos Kiese, their fifth manager of the year, and had a one-point lead over Cerro going into the game.

They also went ahead, after 23 minutes, with a freak goal by Carlos Galvan. His free-kick, taken inside his own half, evaded a group of players in the penalty area and bounced over goalkeeper Danilo Aceval into the net.

However, Walter Fretes equalised on the stroke of half-time, and Dos Santos and Erwin Avalos scored for Cerro early in the second half to secure victory. The following week, Avalos scored twice and Dos Santos got the other goal as Cerro beat General Caballero, also 3-1, to clinch the title.

Olimpia lost 2-0 at home to Guarani on the final day to miss out on the Libertadores Cup, which they won in 2002.

Brian Homewood

BOLIVIA

Blooming flower as Bolivar wilt

Blooming won the opening championship by five points after

closest rivals Bolivar, who had already been docked three points on FIFA's orders for non-payment to former coach Gustavo Huerta, lost their last game after being forced to field a youth team because of a pay dispute with the senior players.

Blooming had given Bolivar a sight of the championship after crashing to a 5-0 defeat at La Paz in their penultimate game.

But the team from the eastern city of Santa Cruz bounced back to clinch the title with a 3-2 win away to The Strongest.

Meanwhile, Bolivar's challenge collapsed when the senior players refused to travel to Oruro to face San Jose in their final game because they said the club had failed to honour an agreement to pay all outstanding wages before the fixture. The club were forced to field their Under-19 team instead, and though the youngsters put up a spirited performance, they lost 1-0.

Bolivar and Blooming, coached by Argentina-born former Bolivia international Gustavo Quinteros, had both won their respective groups to qualify for the final six-team round robin.

Brian Homewood

VENEZUELA

Union stay on high

Union Atletico Maracaibo, the 2004-05 champions, won this season's opening title after going on a 15-game unbeaten run. The team's only defeat came in the second round, away to Caracas, and they clinched the stage with two games to spare when winning 1-0 at second-placed Deportivo Tachira.

Brian Homewood

Cows about that!

URUGUAY

Grassroots support…Rocha fans roar on the rural club towards their championship triumph

THE OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP had a distinctly rural feel to it as Rocha became the first team from outside Montevideo to win a title since the professional league began in 1932. Rocha clinched the trophy with a 2-1 home win over Rampla Juniors in their penultimate game, and the players celebrated by leading a cow around the field during their lap of honour, to the delight of the 7,000 fans packed into the tiny Mario Sobrero stadium.

Rocha's training pitch is adjacent to a field where a herd of cows graze and became famous when it was photographed earlier in the championship. After that, the fans decided to adopt one of the cows as a lucky mascot.

Rocha, based in the town of the same name about 120 miles east of Montevideo, were founded only in 1999 when 36 local amateur teams decided to join forces. The monthly wage budget is just £9,000 and many of the players, most of whom are local, cycle to training.

Coach Luis Gonzalez admitted winning the title had hardly been a priority at the start of the campaign. "The target was to avoid relegation," he said. "But if you want something badly, you can achieve it, and that's what I tried to transmit to the boys. There's no rule about what you can do and how far you can go."

Rocha entered the top division in 2000 as part of the FA's drive to bring in more teams from outside the capital. They were relegated in 2001 but were back two years later.

Rocha, who finished with 33 points from 17 games, appeared to have blown their chances when they lost 4-2 at home to Nacional in their 11th game, but bounced back with successive wins over bottom club Paysandu, Wanderers and Fenix. Pedro Cardoso was the championship's top scorer with 11 goals, overtaking team-mate Mauro Aldave with a hat-trick in the final game, a 4-4 draw at Penarol.

Paysandu set an unwanted record when only eight spectators paid to watch their final home game, a 5-1 defeat by Deportivo Colonia.

Penarol, the country's most popular club, were the big losers as they failed to win any of their last six games to miss out on a place in the Libertadores Cup.

Brian Homewood

We're the tops…Rodallega (second right) and his team-mates get that champion feeling

Hugo-als galore

COLOMBIA

HUGO RODALLEGA, who was top scorer with 11 goals in Colombia's South American Under-20 Championship triumph last January, repeated the feat at club level, helping Deportivo Cali win their first domestic title in eight years.

The 20-year-old was joint top scorer with 12 as Cali drove towards the closing championship, and scored both goals in Cali's 2-0 away defeat of Real Cartagena in the Final first leg. An early strike by Chilean Jaime Riveros in the return sealed Cali's eighth title.

Real Cartagena, from the Caribbean city of the same name, provided the romance in the campaign as they reached their first Final a year after climbing out of the Second Division. They booked a place with a 4-0 win over Independiente Santa Fe in the final round of play-off group games.

Brian Homewood

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Now, where was I?…Luxemburgo faces the media on his return to Brazil after his 11-month sojourn at Real Madrid

Luxemburgo back at Santos

BRAZIL

IT IS AS IF HE'D NEVER been away. Vanderlei Luxemburgo has gone straight back to Santos, as self-confident as ever and still, in his own opinion, nothing less than a winner.

Luxemburgo, who left the club to join Real Madrid 11 months earlier, insisted that the only reason he did not land a major trophy in Spain was because they did not give him enough time. "I didn't lose; they didn't let me win," said the coach, who once claimed that being pelted with coins by supporters of a rival side was a sign of affection.

"They hired a coach who is well known in Brazil but it seems they didn't know anything about him. If they had known me, they would have known that I was capable of winning a major title, either the Champions League or the Spanish championship.

"My big victory was to have gone there in the first place…It was a fantastic experience to work with different players from different cultures. I'm stronger and with experience I didn't have before."

Luxemburgo, who led Santos to the 2004 Brazilian championship, returned to a huge rebuilding job. In the year since his departure, Pele's former club sold off their top players, including Robinho – ironically, to Madrid – and employed four different coaches. Oswaldo Oliveira, Gallo and Nelsinho Baptista were all hired and fired, with former Brazil striker Serginho Chulapa finishing the season as caretaker. Perhaps not surprisingly, Santos finished only 10th in the national championship.

Luxemburgo's return coincided with the departure of Paulo Autuori from Sao Paulo, whom he led to triumph in last year's Libertadores Cup and Club World Championship. Autuori was lured to Japan's Kashima Antlers by what he described as an offer he couldn't refuse. The former Peru coach turned down an initial approach, only for Kashima to offer even more money. "I discussed it with my family and we decided it was better to go," said Autuori.

It is the second time Sao Paulo have lost a coach to Japan in under a year. Emerson Leao also abandoned ship last April to join Vissel Kobe.

Autuori was replaced by Muricy Ramalho, who led Internacional to second place in last year's national championship. Ramalho's place, in turn, was taken by Abel Braga, who left Fluminense after a year in which they exceeded expectations but blew two chances of a place in the Libertadores Cup.

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Firstly, "Flu" lost to Second Division Paulista in the Final of the Copa Brasil, which is generally regarded as the easiest way of qualifying for South America's top club competition. Then they managed to avoid a top-four finish in the Brazilian championship – the other way of qualifying – by losing their last five games. Just a draw in their final match, against Palmeiras, would have been enough to book their place, but they conceded two late goals after leading 2-1. Palmeiras' victory meant they qualified instead.

Romario, 40 at the end of January, has signed another one-year deal with Vasco da Gama for what surely will be the final year of his career. There was talk of a move to champions Corinthians but the forward preferred to stay in Rio de Janeiro, the only place in Brazil he has played club football.

"Corinthians can buy any player in the world," said Vasco president Eurico Miranda. "But they have one small problem – they are in Sao Paulo, and Sao Paulo doesn't have any beaches. And Sao Paulo doesn't have a club like Vasco, where Romario is the king. He will not go to another club where he is the prince or just another member of the court."

Brian Homewood

PERU

Del Solar powers Cristal to title

Former Peru midfielder Jose Del Solar won the 2005 championship title in his first season as coach of Sporting Cristal, who beat Cienciano 1-0 in the play-off Final. Del Solar's appointment in May was greeted with suspicion by the Cristal faithful because he had always been associated with arch-rivals Universitario. However, he quickly won them over, leading the club to top spot in the closing championship and into the play-off against the opening campaign winners. Carlos Zegarra scored the goal just before half-time.

Brian Homewood

ECUADOR

Kangaroo is Nacional hero

Felix Borja was the key man for Quito army club El Nacional as they won the closing championship, their first title since 1996. The forward, nicknamed The Kangaroo because of his aerial prowess, scored both goals in the 2-0 win against Barcelona that clinched the title, lifting his tally to 15. El Nacional, coached by former Paraguay boss Ever Almeida, have won 12 titles since the championship was started in 1957, just one short of Barcelona's record tally.

Brian Homewood

CHILE

Catolica spot on

Universidad Catolica won the 2005 closing championship, beating rivals Universidad de Chile on penalties in the Final. Catolica, coached by Jorge Pellicer, won the first leg 1-0 but lost the second 2-1, their first defeat in the entire 25-match campaign. No extra-time was played and Catolica won 5-4 on spot-kicks.

Ten days later, Universidad de Chile coach Hector Pinto quit under pressure from the club's largest fan group, who call themselves "The Ones From Below". They posted Pinto's telephone number on their website and encouraged members to ring up and insult him. After he resigned, the website gloated: "If he can't take a couple of calls, he's not the man to coach our team."

Pinto's replacement is Gustavo Huerta, poached from Cobreloa.

Colo Colo, who make up the Big Three with the two Universidads, again failed to make it past the quarter-finals, prompting Croatian general manager Mirko Jozic, their former coach, to resign after just seven months.

Brian Homewood

'Boring' Toluca take the prize

MEXICO

TOLUCA, LABELLED AS boring by the critics for grinding out results in the knockout stages, won the opening championship after a fiery Final second leg during which opponents Monterrey had three players sent off. Monterrey had managed a 3-3 draw away in the first leg but were thumped 3-0 in the return.

The game swung Toluca's way when Pablo Serafin was sent off in the 14th minute for hacking down Uruguayan forward Vicente Sanchez. Jose Joel Gonzalez followed him off early in the second half for punching an opponent. Sanchez then put Toluca ahead, Luis Perez was dismissed for a second bookable offence, and Sanchez and Rodrigo Diaz added two more goals in injury-time.

The Monterrey players, furious with the refereeing of Marco Antonio "Dracula" Rodriguez, initially threatened to boycott the awards ceremony on the pitch, saying that the federation officials and Rodriguez could take their silver medals. They eventually backed down, although club vice-president Luis Manuel Salvador launched a stinging attack on the referee and said his team had been robbed.

Coach Miguel Herrera also voiced his disenchantment, saying: "The sendings-off were very tough and made us lose everything we have achieved."

Monterrey took a two-goal lead after just nine minutes of the first leg, through Perez (a penalty) and Carlos Casartelli. Sanchez and Jose Manuel Abundis dragged Toluca level two minutes into the second half, and although Paulo Da Silva put through his own goal to give Monterrey the lead again, a late penalty from Diaz salvaged a draw.

Toluca picked up the boring tag in their quarter-final against Cruz Azul, when they held out grimly for a goalless draw away in the second leg after winning the opener 1-0. They followed that with another 0-0 draw away to Pachuca in the first leg of their semi-final, winning the return 2-1 with goals from Da Silva and Carlos Esquivel.

Toluca's Final triumph – their eighth championship success – gave Argentinian coach Americo Gallego his first Mexican title win just six months after arriving in the country and exactly a year after leading Newell's Old Boys to the opening championship title in his homeland. The 1978 World Cup winner has also won Argentinian titles with River Plate and Independiente.

Other key figures for the Red Devils were Sanchez, who has been overlooked by the Uruguayan national side, Paraguayan defender Da Silva and Antonio Naelson, the Brazil-born midfielder who is a regular choice for Mexico.

Cruz Azul coach Ruben Omar Romano, who survived a two-month kidnap ordeal earlier in the year, was ruthlessly sacked following the quarter-final defeat. The Blue Machine gave his job to Isaac Mizrahi, who stood in when Romano was in captivity and won seven of his eight games in charge.

Defending champions America, with a line-up boasting Mexico captain Pavel Pardo, former Argentina forward Claudio Lopez, Brazilian pair Irenio and Kleber, and volatile Mexico striker Cuauhtemoc Blanco, were hot favourites to win the opening title. But after clocking up a season-best 38 points in the 17-game group stage and strolling to a 3-1 win away to Tigres in the quarter-final first leg, America inexplicably crashed 4-1 in the Azteca in the return.

Brian Homewood

Holding on to the dream…Pablo Granoche and Israel Lopez celebrate Toluca's opening championship victory

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Socceroos avoid the big guns

That will do nicely…newcomers Australia have their good luck confirmed at the Asian Cup qualifying draw in Kuala Lumpur

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

AUSTRALIA RECEIVED a major boost just days after their move on to the Asian football scene was officially completed when handed a favourable draw for the 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers.

Guus Hiddink's side were placed among the lowest-ranked countries since the seedings were based on results in the previous Asian Cup in 2004. So there were sighs of relief when they managed to avoid the continent's big guns, being pooled with Lebanon, Bahrain and Kuwait in Group D instead.

The top two from each of the six groups go into the finals, to be staged in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand – who all qualify automatically – and Australia will be favourites to top their pool. Not only that, but playing all their away ties in the Middle East makes it likely Hiddink will be able to field more of his Europe-based players than if they had faced trips to east or south Asia.

The belief that the draw could have been so much worse was confirmed when Asia's four World Cup entrants were split between just two groups – defending Asian champions Japan and Saudi Arabia going into Group A, with Yemen and India, and Iran and South Korea into Group B, with Syria and Taiwan.

Jordan, surprise quarter-finalists in 2004, face a tough task to even make the finals this time having been drawn with Oman, one of the continent's up-and-coming nations, 1996 finalists United Arab Emirates and Pakistan in Group C. China, losing finalists three years ago, are in Group E with Iraq, Singapore and Palestine, while the Group F line-up is Uzbekistan, Qatar, Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

Although there was relief in the Australian camp from a playing point of view, being pooled with three Middle Eastern nations has raised concerns about potential crowd trouble because of the recent attacks on people of Middle Eastern appearance in Sydney. Lebanon has a large expatriate population in Australia, making the countries' meeting there a particular concern.

The Australian federation has attempted to dispel such worries, suggesting the tie – likely to be staged on September 1 – is a chance to heal wounds. "There's a great opportunity for the bad press to be laid to rest," said John Boultbee, head of the federation's international department. "It will send a very strong message. One of our players, Ahmad Elrich, is of Lebanese descent and there's a very strong following of the team by the Lebanese community. My concerns would be very, very small."

Australia's first official match as a member of the Asian Football Confederation will be against Bahrain on February 22 in Manama.

Michael Church

ASIA ROUND-UP

● East Bank-Pomina Steel have been demoted from VIETNAM'S top division because of their part in a match-fixing scandal. Two other clubs – Song Lam Nghe An and Hai Phong – are also suspected of corruption.

● Chonbuk Motors won the SOUTH KOREAN Cup, beating Hyundai Mipo Dockyard 1-0 in the Final. Milton Rodriguez scored the goal after 13 minutes.

● Belgian international striker Emile Mpenza has joined QATARI side Al Rayyan from Hamburg.

● Kyiv Dynamo striker Maksim Shatskikh has been voted UZBEKISTAN'S Player of the Year. Veteran midfielder Mirdjalal Kasimov was second.

● SINGAPORE coach Raddy Avramovic has signed a new two-year contract. The Serb guided the team to last year's Tiger Cup victory.

Michael Church & Azam Mahmood

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SAUDI ARABIA

Calderon ditched before World Cup

Argentinian Gabriel Calderon was fired as Saudi Arabia coach with barely six months to go until the World Cup, and replaced by former Brazil youth team boss Marcos Paqueta.

Calderon was relieved of his duties in mid-December after a second-string side finished fourth at the West Asian Games in Qatar. The poor showing heaped pressure on the Argentinian, despite the role he played in turning around Saudi fortunes since taking over in late 2004, culminating in the team qualifying for a fourth straight World Cup.

When Calderon arrived, the Saudis were in disarray following their early exit from the Asian Cup in China earlier that year. But the new coach steered them to the World Cup as unbeaten winners of their final phase qualifying group – ahead of 2002 semi-finalists South Korea – conceding just one goal in six games.

Paqueta, whose contract runs until the end of next year's Asian Cup finals, coached Al Hilal to the Saudi League and Cup double last season following a successful spell in the national team set-up in his homeland. He led Brazil's Under-17s and Under-20s to world championship triumphs in 2003.

Michael Church

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Macala axed by Al Ain

Al Ain have fired coached Milan Macala two months after he guided the club to the Asian Champions League Final. But the Czech, one of the most successful coaches in the Middle East over the past decade, received his marching orders after the team lost 2-1 to Al Ahli in the UAE League, leaving them only fourth and 10 points behind leaders Al Wahda.

"Things haven't gone well of late and under the circumstances the management thought a change was necessary," said Al Ain board member Hamad Al-Amri. "Macala has served us well. He won the President's Cup and led the team into the Champions League Final, and we thank him."

The new coach is Tunisian Mohammad Menssi, and the club have also brought in two players – Serbian forward Nenad Jestrovic and Brazilian midfielder Kelly, replacing Panamanians Luis Tejada and Alberto Blanco.

Michael Church

Out of the door…Steve McMahon

No Glory for McMahon

OCEANIA

FORMER LIVERPOOL and England midfielder Steve McMahon became the first coaching casualty in AUSTRALIA'S new A League when parting company with Perth Glory by mutual agreement.

Even before the season started, in August, there were rumours that the players were unhappy about McMahon's training methods. More recently, there was widespread criticism of his insistence on fielding his son, Stephen McMahon Jnr, despite some below-par displays.

McMahon's replacement is compatriot Alan Vest. The 66-year-old, an assistant at Glory since 2001, has previously coached in Malaysia, Singapore and England.

Adelaide United led by seven points from Sydney FC with five rounds of the league stage to go. The top four go into the play-offs.

● The NEW ZEALAND League has also witnessed its first coaching change, former Scotland goalkeeper Jonathon Gould replacing ex-Kiwi international Perry Cotton at Hawkes Bay United. Cotton left after the club lost their first six games, but Gould stopped the rot, his new charges beating Waitakere United 1-0 in his first game in charge. Youngheart Manawatu led by a point from champions Auckland City after nine rounds.

● COOK ISLANDS Cup winners Nikao made it a Double when clinching the League title on the back of an 11-game unbeaten run.

● General Motors won FIJI'S National Club Championship, beating Malolo 1-0 in the Final.

Paul Moon

Araujo leaves with top award

JAPAN

BRAZILIAN STRIKER Araujo rounded off a memorable final season in Japanese football by picking up the Player of the Year award. The Gamba Osaka forward, who is returning to his homeland, was League top scorer with 33 goals, which drove his side to their first championship title. Gamba boss Akira Nishino picked up the managerial award.

Araujo's strike partner, Masashi Oguro, is also leaving Gamba – for French Second Division side Grenoble – so Nishino will have his work cut out to retain the title.

Urawa Reds beat Shimizu S-Pulse 2-1 in the Emperor's Cup Final to lift the trophy for the first time in 25 years. Guido Buchwald's side took a two-goal lead through Satoshi Horinouchi and Croat Tomislav Maric, and though Shimizu pulled one back through Daisuke Ichikawa their chances of drawing level effectively ended with the dismissal of Kohei Hiramatsu with five minutes to go.

Urawa have now signed Washington from relegated Tokyo Verdy 1969. The former Brazil player hit 22 goals last season, second only to Araujo.

Ventforet Kofu stormed into the top flight after beating Kashiwa Reysol 8-3 on aggregate in the relegation/promotion play-off. Brazilian striker Bare hit all Kofu's goals in the 6-2 second leg win at Kashiwa, a J.League record.

Nagoya Grampus Eight have brought in Dutch coaching pair Sef Vergoossen and Dwight Lodeweges from United Arab Emirates side Al Jazira. They replace Brazilian duo Nelsinho and Mauro, who departed in September. Grampus saw out the season under Japanese caretaker Hitoshi Nakata and finished a disappointing 14th.

FC Tokyo have brought in a Brazilian boss, Gallo, most recently in charge at Santos, to replace Hiromi Hara. A number of other coaches have resigned, including Toninho Cerezo of Kashima Antlers – who replaced him with Sao Paulo's Paulo Autuori – and Yasuharu Sorimachi of Albirex Niigata.

Mike Plastow & Yumiko Nagae

Golden goodbye…Brazil-bound Araujo takes the prize

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TALENT SCOUT

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Cristian MORA

Ecuador's No 1 facing physical onslaught in Germany

"MORA IS THE best we've got," said Ecuador coach Luis Fernando Suarez on the eve of October's crunch World Cup qualifier against Uruguay. "There are those who may disagree, but I believe he should be our goalkeeper."

It was an interesting declaration, from which three swift deductions can be made – goalkeeper is a problem position for Ecuador, Suarez is sure Cristian Mora is the solution, but not everyone is of the same opinion.

The headache began in early 2004 when long-standing first-choice Jose Cevallos suffered a serious injury. Replacing him proved difficult. In that year's Copa America Ecuador used three keepers in their three games, all defeats. The experienced but eccentric Jacinto Espinoza and Geovanny Ibarra could not be trusted and the younger Damian Lanza has been hindered by a lack of opportunities at club level.

Then Suarez took over and first turned to Edwin Villafuerte. But some wild off-field antics lost him some points and his chances were further hit when Cevallos recovered to take his place at Guayaquil side Barcelona.

But by this time Mora had come through – and in the fast lane. Good form for Macara in 2004 won him a loan spell at big club LDU Quito. In quick time he displaced Espinoza, first-choice there for almost a decade, won himself a domestic title and did well in the club's Libertadores Cup campaign.

Mora, lithe, athletic and impressive in one-on-one situations, was given an international opportunity in a friendly against Italy in New Jersey last summer. He stood tall in the Giants stadium, ensuring his side a 1-1 draw when he threw himself to the right to block Cristiano Lucarelli's late penalty. From that moment he has been first-choice for Ecuador, and justified his selection as the team cemented their World Cup place.

But some observers have yet to be convinced about Mora's abilities. The 23-year-old's strong point is certainly not coming for crosses, not least because of his slender build. Ecuador's goalkeeping coach, experienced Uruguayan Lorenzo Calabs, acknowledges the problem, saying: "In this position it helps to have a bit of muscle. If you don't have it, then you must jump with your knee in front. I told Mora this, he didn't listen, and the first few times he came out he was bundled into the back of the net. Now he's learned that if he doesn't follow this advice he's going to be eaten up."

Being drawn with Germany and Poland, physically powerful sides, in the World Cup is clearly a concern. But if Ecuadoreans are nervous, their keeper will be even more so.

"Mora is a special case," says his club coach, Peruvian Juan Carlos Oblitas. "Before the game you think he's going to die of nerves. Then he goes out and shows admirable temperament."

The keeper says it's just the same for Ecuador matches. "I'm always nervous before a game," he says. "I keep wandering around, no one can find me. But when I walk out and hear the national anthem with my hand on my chest, the nerves disappear. The national team is more than a responsibility; it's a feeling. It's a team you have to love and defend with all your strength."

His compatriots hope he proves strong enough to keep out Germany, Poland and the rest in June.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club	LDU Quito
Country	Ecuador
Born	August 20, 1982, in San Miguel de Bolivar
Previous clubs	Olmedo, Espoli, Deportivo Saquisili, Macara
International debut	June 2005, v Italy
International caps	4
Honours	Ecuadorean opening championship 2005 (LDU)

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Tim BOROWSKI

All-action midfielder tipped to replace Ballack

WERDER BREMEN'S Tim Borowski may look every inch a centre-back, but don't be fooled by his lanky, angular appearance. The blond 25-year-old is rightly considered one of the best all-purpose midfielders in the Bundesliga.

Borowski, a right-footer who normally operates on the left of the midfield diamond, could never be accused of going missing. He is combative, strong and energetic from first to last minute, giving him a sound defensive game, while he has made huge strides in attacking mode in the past couple of years, notably in his distribution, the timing of his dynamic forward incursions and in his finishing.

The Werder coaching staff used to say Borowski was not consistent enough. Not any more. "For a while after breaking into the first team I was just happy to be a professional footballer," admits Borowski, who hails from the eastern German maritime province of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. "Now I know that's not enough. I make more demands on myself."

Rudi Voller awarded Borowski his first cap back in August 2002 and is still a big fan. "Tim has the potential for a great future in the game," says the former Germany coach. "Thanks to his intelligence, physical dominance and vision, he is on the verge of a major breakthrough. I don't think it's a problem that many are comparing him with Michael Ballack. Rather, it should be a motivation for Tim."

Borowski and Ballack are invariably mentioned in the same breath these days and the word is that Bayern will turn to the Werder man should Ballack fly the coop at the end of the season.

However, Borowski is under contract until 2009 and he has strong ties with the Bremen club, having joined them straight from school as a 16-year-old. "I'm very happy here," he says. "I want to win more trophies with Werder and I believe that's a real possibility."

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club	Werder Bremen
Country	Germany
Born	May 2, 1980, in Neubrandenburg
Previous club	FCT Neubrandenburg
International debut	August 2002, v Bulgaria
International caps	15 (2 goals)
Honours	German League 2004; German Cup 2004

Jonathan DE GUZMAN

Canadian teenager thinking of going Dutch

HOLLAND COACH Marco Van Basten has already publicly supported Ivory Coast-born Salomon Kalou in his attempt to apply for Dutch citizenship. Don't be surprised if he does the same for another promising Feyenoord youngster.

Eighteen-year-old Jonathan De Guzman was born in Canada but has played at Feyenoord since the age of 12 and can now apply for Dutch citizenship. The midfielder has already turned down several invitations from the Canadian FA, including the chance to play for the Under-20s at last year's World Youth Cup in Holland. "It's too early to make a decision," De Guzman says. "All I want is to concentrate on Feyenoord and give something back for what they have done for me."

While De Guzman might choose Holland ahead of Canada – he went to school in his adoptive country and speaks fluent Dutch – there are family matters to consider. Elder brother Julian, who plays in Spain for Deportivo La Coruna, is a Canadian international, and Jonathan says: "It's my dream to play together with my brother. Besides, I haven't heard from the Dutch FA so far."

Julian moved to Europe at 16. Although he failed to impress during a trial at Feyenoord, he won a place in the Marseille set-up and advised his brother to move overseas as soon as possible. Jonathan made a bigger impression during his trial with the Rotterdam club, moved quickly through the ranks, and made his senior debut in September last year. Within weeks De Guzman was a regular starter.

His greatest strength is his versatility, and coach Erwin Koeman says: "He has almost everything a great player needs. The only thing missing is experience." De Guzman, whose contract was recently extended until 2010, is learning quickly. In Feyenoord's recent 1-0 win over PSV he outplayed Phillip Cocu, arguably the Dutch League's best player. But the youngster is determined not to get carried away, saying: "I need to learn to share out my energy. Not to give 110 per cent in the first seconds."

Klaas-Jan Droppert

FACT FILE

Club	Feyenoord (Hol)
Country	Canada or Holland
Born	September 13, 1987, in Toronto
Previous club	North Scarborough (Can)

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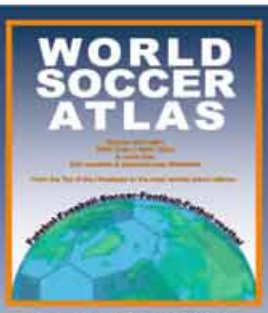

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FIFA WORLD PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2005

World's best...Ronaldinho picks up his award

Pos		Pts
1	RONALDINHO	956
2	Frank LAMPARD	306
3	Samuel ETO'O	190
4	Thierry HENRY	172
5	ADRIANO	170
6	Andrii SHEVCHENKO	153
7	Steven GERRARD	131
8	KAKA	101
9	Paolo MALDINI	76
10	Didier DROGBA	65
11	Michael BALLACK	64
12	RONALDO	63
13	Zinedine ZIDANE	55
14	Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC	36
15	DECO	24
16	Juan Roman RIQUELME	20
17	ROBINHO	19
18	David BECKHAM	17
	Wayne ROONEY	17
20	CRISTIANO RONALDO	13
21	Michael ESSIEN	11
	Ruud VAN NISTELROOY	11
23	Pavel NEDVED	8
	RAUL	8
25	Arjen ROBBEN	5
26	CAFU	3
	Alessandro NESTA	3
	Jay-Jay OKOCHA	3
	ROBERTO CARLOS	3
30	Gianluigi BUFFON	1

The coach and captain of every national team was eligible to vote for their top three players from FIFA's shortlist of 30. First choices were awarded 5pts, second choices 3pts and third choices 1pt.

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MATCH SCHEDULE

GROUP A

Fri, June 9	Germany v Costa Rica	Munich	18:00
Fri, June 9	Poland v Ecuador	Gelsenkirchen	21:00
Wed, June 14	Germany v Poland	Dortmund	21:00
Thu, June 15	Ecuador v Costa Rica	Hamburg	15:00
Tue, June 20	Ecuador v Germany	Berlin	16:00
Tue, June 20	Costa Rica v Poland	Hanover	16:00

GROUP B

Sat, June 10	England v Paraguay	Frankfurt	15:00
Sat, June 10	Trinidad & Tobago v Sweden	Dortmund	18:00
Thu, June 15	England v Trinidad & Tobago	Nuremberg	18:00
Thu, June 15	Sweden v Paraguay	Berlin	21:00
Tue, June 20	Sweden v England	Cologne	21:00
Tue, June 20	Paraguay v Trinidad & Tobago	Kaiserslautern	21:00

GROUP C

Sat, June 10	Argentina v Ivory Coast	Hamburg	21:00
Sun, June 11	Serbia & Montenegro v Holland	Leipzig	15:00
Fri, June 16	Argentina v Serbia & Montenegro	Gelsenkirchen	15:00
Fri, June 16	Holland v Ivory Coast	Stuttgart	18:00
Wed, June 21	Holland v Argentina	Frankfurt	21:00
Wed, June 21	Ivory Coast v Serbia & Montenegro	Munich	21:00

GROUP D

Sun, June 11	Mexico v Iran	Nuremberg	18:00
Sun, June 11	Angola v Portugal	Cologne	21:00
Fri, June 16	Mexico v Angola	Hanover	21:00
Sat, June 17	Portugal v Iran	Frankfurt	15:00
Wed, June 21	Portugal v Mexico	Gelsenkirchen	16:00
Wed, June 21	Iran v Angola	Leipzig	16:00

GROUP E

Mon, June 12	United States v Czech Republic	Gelsenkirchen	18:00
Mon, June 12	Italy v Ghana	Hanover	21:00
Sat, June 17	Czech Republic v Ghana	Cologne	18:00
Sat, June 17	Italy v United States	Kaiserslautern	21:00
Thu, June 22	Czech Republic v Italy	Hamburg	16:00
Thu, June 22	Ghana v United States	Nuremberg	16:00

GROUP F

Mon, June 12	Australia v Japan	Kaiserslautern	15:00
Tue, June 13	Brazil v Croatia	Berlin	21:00
Sun, June 18	Japan v Croatia	Nuremberg	15:00
Sun, June 18	Brazil v Australia	Munich	18:00
Thu, June 22	Japan v Brazil	Dortmund	21:00
Thu, June 22	Croatia v Australia	Stuttgart	21:00

GROUP G

Tue, June 13	South Korea v Togo	Frankfurt	15:00
Tue, June 13	France v Switzerland	Stuttgart	18:00
Sun, June 18	France v South Korea	Leipzig	21:00
Mon, June 19	Togo v Switzerland	Dortmund	15:00
Fri, June 23	Togo v France	Cologne	21:00
Fri, June 23	Switzerland v South Korea	Hanover	21:00

GROUP H

Wed, June 14	Spain v Ukraine	Leipzig	15:00
Wed, June 14	Tunisia v Saudi Arabia	Munich	18:00
Mon, June 19	Saudi Arabia v Ukraine	Hamburg	18:00
Mon, June 19	Spain v Tunisia	Stuttgart	21:00
Fri, June 23	Saudi Arabia v Spain	Kaiserslautern	16:00
Fri, June 23	Ukraine v Tunisia	Berlin	16:00

SECOND ROUND

Sat, June 24	Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd	Munich	17:00	(SR1)
Sat, June 24	Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd	Leipzig	21:00	(SR2)
Sun, June 25	Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd	Stuttgart	17:00	(SR3)
Sun, June 25	Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd	Nuremberg	21:00	(SR4)
Mon, June 26	Gp E 1st v Gp F 2nd	Kaiserslautern	17:00	(SR5)
Mon, June 26	Gp G 1st v Gp H 2nd	Cologne	21:00	(SR6)
Tue, June 27	Gp F 1st v Gp E 2nd	Dortmund	17:00	(SR7)
Tue, June 27	Gp H 1st v Gp G 2nd	Hanover	21:00	(SR8)

QUARTER-FINALS

Fri, June 30	Winners SR1 v Winners SR2	Berlin	17:00	(QF1)
Fri, June 30	Winners SR5 v Winners SR6	Hamburg	21:00	(QF2)
Sat, July 1	Winners SR3 v Winners SR4	Gelsenkirchen	17:00	(QF3)
Sat, July 1	Winners SR7 v Winners SR8	Frankfurt	21:00	(QF4)

SEMI-FINALS

Tue, July 4	Winners QF1 v Winners QF2	Dortmund	21:00
Wed, July 5	Winners QF3 v Winners QF4	Munich	21:00

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Sat, July 8		Stuttgart	21:00

FINAL

Sun, July 9		Berlin	20:00

Kick-off times are local

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INTERNATIONALS

Sunday, December 11
Dec 11 - Lubumbashi - friendly
DR Congo 1
Zambia 1
HT: 1-1

Wednesday, December 14
Dec 14 - Phoenix, USA - friendly
Mexico 2 (Fonseca 33, Huiqui 52)
Hungary 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 32,466. **Ref:** Valenzuela (USA)
Mexico: Corona (Ochoa 46) - F Rodriguez (Castro 46), Huiqui, Suarez (H Sanchez 69), A Rodriguez, Olvera (Guardado 69), Torrado, Juan P Rodriguez (Sandoval 55), Fonseca (A Medina 65), Bautista, Bravo.
Hungary: Raboczki - Balog, Vanczak, Vermes, Bojte, Koller, Rosa, Vadocz, Tozser (Priskin 66), Feczesin (Regedei 71), Rajczi (Ferenczi 59).
Sent off: Rosa 10min.

Dec 14 - Kitwe - friendly
Zambia 4 (Milanzi 3, 62, Phiri 10, Kasonde 14)
DR Congo 1 (N Ilunga 55)
HT: 3-0
Zambia: Kolala - Kasonde, Tana, Nkethani, Sinyangwe, Njovu, Mwansa (Lwipa 60), Numba (Bakala 60), Mulenga, Phiri (Mwila 78), Milanzi (Bwalya 90).
DR Congo: Muteba - Dituabanza, Kasongo (Kaluyituka 78), Bayasingwa, Kabundi, N Ilunga, Mukandila (Kalomi 39), Matumona (D Ilunga 85), Mbokane, Lutunda (Tambwe 39), Bokese (Mbayi 15).

Friday, December 16
Dec 16 - Curepipe - friendly
Mauritius 1
Reunion 1
HT: 0-1

Sunday, December 18
Dec 18 - Miami, USA - friendly
Antigua & Barbuda 0
Hungary 3 (Vadocz 10, Feczesin 32, Ferenczi 80)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 250
Antigua & Barbuda: E Anthony (Nathaniel 82) - Tyriellien, Martin (Harris 54), Dublin, Pereira (James 71), Andrew (Julian 38), Byers (T Thomas 66), Troy Simon (Bleau 63), Christian, Williams, Jeffers.
Hungary: Raboczki (Vlaszak 85) - Vermes (Regedei 39), Bojte, Koller (Balog 87), Vanczak (Takacs 87), Vadocz, Feczesin (Kapcsos 80), Tozser, Priskin (Majoros 66), Rajczi (Bori 46), Sitku (Ferenczi 56).

Dec 18 - friendly
Reunion 1
Mauritius 2
HT: 0-0

Saturday, December 31
Dec 31 - Harare - friendly
Zimbabwe 1 (Mbwando 63)
Zambia 1 (Phiri 85)
HT: 0-0

Monday, January 2
Jan 2 - Doha - friendly
Qatar 2 (Lami 53, 60)
Libya 0
HT: 0-0

Thursday, January 5
Jan 5 - Alexandria - friendly
Egypt 2 (Ali 33, 78)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 1-0
Egypt: El-Hadary - Barakat, El-Saqqa, I Said (A El-Sayed), Gomaa, Abdel Wahab (T El-Sayed), Fathi, Sabri (A Hassan), Aboutraika (Abdel Malek), Moteab (H Hassan), Zaki (Ali).

Saturday, January 7
Jan 7 - Viry-Chatillon, France - friendly
Guinea 1 (O Bangoura pen 65)
Togo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Piccirillo (Fra)
Guinea: Diarso - M Cisse, Kaba, A Diallo, I Camara, O Bangoura, K Sylla, M Sylla, Yattara (S Camara 73), Ibrahima Bangoura, Ismael Bangoura (Souare 46).
Togo: Agassa - Mathias (Kokougan 68), Akoto, Tchangai (Abalo 46), Atte-Oudeyi (Forson 57), Senaya (S Toure 56), Guyazou, Halirou (Agboh 71), Salifou, S Coubadja (Dogbe 71), Oyawole (Tokple 51).

Monday, January 9
Jan 9 - Rabat - friendly
Morocco 3 (Chamakh 32, Abouchouane 52, Armoumen 67)
DR Congo 0
HT: 1-0

Wednesday, January 11
Jan 11 - Monastir, Tunisia - friendly
Togo 1 (Olufade 73)
Ghana 0
HT: 0-0

Thursday, January 12
Jan 12 - Rades - friendly
Tunisia 1 (Letifi 73)
Libya 0
HT: 0-0
Tunisia: Kasraoui - Saidi (Hagui 60), Clayton, Jaidi, Merdassi, Bouazizi (Jemaa 87), Chedli (Ben Saada 73), Namouchi (Mnari 62), Benachour (Melliti 52), Santos, Gmamdia (Letifi 46).

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP
(South Asian Football Federation)

In Karachi, Pakistan

Group A
Dec 7
Maldives 9 (Umer 11, Fazeel 26, 45, 60, Ashfaq 32, 88, Thariq 45, 46, 86)
Afghanistan 1 (Maqsood 39)
HT: 5-1

Dec 7
Pakistan 1 (Hussain 38)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 9
Maldives 2 (Ashfaq 15, Umer pen 83)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 9
Pakistan 1 (Essa 53)
Afghanistan 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 11
Sri Lanka 1 (Karunaratne 85)
Afghanistan 2 (Qadami 35, Gullestani 41)
HT: 0-2

Dec 11
Maldives 0
Pakistan 0

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Maldives	3	2	1	0	11	1	7
Pakistan	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
Afghanistan	3	1	0	2	3	11	3
Sri Lanka	3	0	0	3	1	5	0

Group B
Dec 8
Bangladesh 3 (Farhad 42, 58, Ameli 85)
Bhutan 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 8
India 2 (Hussain 6, 28)
Nepal 1 (Thapa 35)
HT: 2-1

Dec 10
India 3 (Bhutia 45, Gawli 51, Hakkim 64)
Bhutan 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 10
Bangladesh 2 (Kanchan 27, 87)
Nepal 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 12
Nepal 3 (Tamang 10, Thapa 16, Gurung 29)
Bhutan 1 (Pradhan 48)
HT: 3-0

Dec 12
Bangladesh 1 (Ameli 77)
India 1 (Lawrence 17)
HT: 0-1

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bangladesh	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
India	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Nepal	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

Semi-finals
Dec 14
Maldives 0
India 1 (Shivananju 38)
HT: 0-1

Dec 14
Bangladesh 1 (Sujan pen 44)
Pakistan 0
HT: 1-0

Final
Dec 17
India 2 (Wadoo 33, Bhutia 81)
Bangladesh 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000

WEST ASIAN GAMES

In Qatar

Group A
Dec 1: Qatar 2 Kuwait 1.
Dec 3: Kuwait 0 Iran 4.
Dec 5: Qatar 1 Iran 4.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	2	2	0	0	8	1	6
Qatar	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Kuwait	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Group B
Dec 3: Oman 1 Syria 3.
Dec 4: Bahrain 2 Syria 2.
Dec 6: Bahrain 2 Oman 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Syria	2	1	1	0	5	3	4
Bahrain	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Oman	2	0	1	1	3	5	1

Group C
Dec 1: Palestine 0 Iraq 4.
Dec 3: Saudi Arabia 2 Palestine 0.
Dec 5: Saudi Arabia 1 Iraq 5.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq	2	2	0	0	9	1	6
Saudi Arabia	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Palestine	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

Group winners and best runner-up qualified for semi-finals (Saudi Arabia won toss of coin against Qatar to decide best runner-up)

Semi-finals
Dec 8: Iran 0 Syria 0 (Syria on pens); Iraq 2 Saudi Arabia 0.

Third-place play-off
Dec 10: Iran 2 Saudi Arabia 1.

Final
Dec 10
Syria 2 (Amena 20, Haoussain 90)
Iraq 2 (Mossa 45, Mahmoud 56)
Aet. **HT:** 1-1. **90mins:** 2-2
Iraq 4-3 on pens

KING'S CUP

In Thailand

Group stage
Dec 24 - Phangnga
Thailand U-23 1 (Teerathep 54)
Latvia 1 (Solonicins 19)
HT: 0-1
Latvia: Piedels - Gorkss (Klava 19), Smirnovs, Ivanovs, Zirnis, Solonicins, Astafjevs, Visnakovs (Karlsons 75), Rubins (Blanks 90), Dobrecovs (Stolcers 60), Prohorenkovs (Kalnins 88).

Dec 24 - Krabi
Oman U-23 2
North Korea 1

Dec 26 - Phuket
North Korea 1
Latvia 1 (Karlsons 65)
HT: 1-0
Latvia: Piedels - Zirnis, Smirnovs, Ivanovs, Klava, Rubins (Dobrecovs 90), Astafjevs (Blanks 88), Morozs, Solonicins (Visnakovs 46), Prohorenkovs, Karlsons (Kalnins 75).

Dec 26 - Phuket
Thailand U-23 1 (Ekaphan 2)
Oman U-23 0
HT: 1-0

Dec 28 - Phuket
Oman U-23 1 (Al-Maghni 90)
Latvia 2 (Karlsons 54, Kalnins 90)
HT: 0-0
Latvia: Piedels - Zirnis, Smirnovs, Ivanovs, Klava, Astafjevs (Visnakovs 46), Morozs, Solonicins, Rubins (Stolcers 89), Dobrecovs (Blanks 65), Karlsons (Kalnins 80).

Dec 28 - Phuket
Thailand U-23 0
North Korea 2 (Kim Chol-ho 7, Hong Yong-jo 9)
HT: 0-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Latvia	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
North Korea	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Thailand U-23	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Oman U-23	3	1	0	2	3	4	3

Top two qualified for Final

Final
Dec 30 - Phuket
North Korea 1 (Hong Yong-jo 47)
Latvia 2 (Karlsons 38, Prohorenkovs 40)
HT: 0-2
Latvia: Piedels - Zirnis, Smirnovs, Ivanovs, Klava, Rubins, Astafjevs, Morozs, Visnakovs (Blanks 52), Prohorenkovs (Stolcers 77), Karlsons (Kalnins 61).

LG CUP

In Cairo

Semi-finals
Dec 27
Senegal 'B' 2 (M Camara 22, Keita 90)
Ecuador 1 (Borja 40)
HT: 1-1

Dec 27
Egypt 2 (Zaki 44, 66)
Uganda 0
HT: 1-0
Egypt: El-Hadary (Abdel Monsef) - Fathi, El-Saqqa, Gomaa, T El-Sayed (Abdel Wahab), Barakat, Moustafa (I Said), A Hassan, Aboutraika, Zaki (Hosni), Moteab (H Hassan).

Third-place play-off
Dec 29
Uganda 2 (Massa 47, Mwanga 54)
Ecuador 1 (Kaviedes 2)
HT: 0-1
Ecuador: Villafuerte - Soledispa, Castro, Guagua, De Jesus (Calle 64), Castillo (Quiroz 62), Caicedo, Saritama (Lara 54), Kaviedes (Mina 78), Benitez, Borja.

Final
Dec 29
Egypt 4 (Moustafa 14, Moteab 22, Zaki 86, 89)
Senegal 'B' 2 (Mendy pen 2, Konate 50)
HT: 2-1
Egypt: Abdelwahed El-Sayed - Fathi, El-Saqqa (Ali), I Said, Gomaa, Abdel Wahab (Aboumesallem), Moustafa (Sabri), Aboutraika, A Hassan (Abdel Malek), Moteab (H Hassan), Belal (Zaki).

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2007 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Preliminary round

1st leg
Dec 22 - Dhaka
Bangladesh 0
Pakistan 0

2nd leg
Dec 26 - Karachi
Pakistan 0
Bangladesh 1 (Hossain 84)
HT: 0-0
Bangladesh 1-0 on agg; qualified for group stage. However, Pakistan also qualified after Sri Lanka withdrew from group stage

Qualifying groups – match schedule

Group A
India
Japan
Saudi Arabia
Yemen

22.02.06 Japan-India
22.02.06 Yemen-Saudi Arabia
01.03.06 India-Yemen
01.03.06 Saudi Arabia-Japan
16.08.06 India-Saudi Arabia
16.08.06 Japan-Yemen
06.09.06 Saudi Arabia-India
06.09.06 Yemen-Japan
11.10.06 India-Japan
11.10.06 Saudi Arabia-Yemen
15.11.06 Japan-Saudi Arabia
15.11.06 Yemen-India

Group B
Iran
South Korea
Syria
Taiwan

22.02.06 Iran-Taiwan
22.02.06 Syria-South Korea
01.03.06 South Korea-Iran
01.03.06 Taiwan-Syria
16.08.06 Iran-Syria
16.08.06 Taiwan-South Korea
06.09.06 South Korea-Taiwan
06.09.06 Syria-Iran
11.10.06 South Korea-Syria
11.10.06 Taiwan-Iran
15.11.06 Iran-South Korea
15.11.06 Syria-Taiwan

Group C
Jordan
Oman
Pakistan
United Arab Emirates

22.02.06 Jordan-Pakistan
22.02.06 UAE-Oman
01.03.06 Oman-Jordan
01.03.06 Pakistan-UAE
16.08.06 Jordan-UAE
16.08.06 Pakistan-Oman
06.09.06 Oman-Pakistan
06.09.06 UAE-Jordan
11.10.06 Oman-UAE
11.10.06 Pakistan-Jordan
15.11.06 Jordan-Oman
15.11.06 UAE-Pakistan

Group D
Australia
Bahrain
Kuwait
Lebanon

22.02.06 Bahrain-Australia
22.02.06 Lebanon-Kuwait
01.03.06 Kuwait-Bahrain
16.08.06 Australia-Kuwait
16.08.06 Bahrain-Lebanon
01.09.06 Australia-Lebanon
06.09.06 Kuwait-Australia
06.09.06 Lebanon-Bahrain
11.10.06 Australia-Bahrain
11.10.06 Kuwait-Lebanon
15.11.06 Bahrain-Kuwait
15.11.06 Lebanon-Australia

Group E
China
Iraq
Palestine
Singapore

22.02.06 China-Palestine
22.02.06 Singapore-Iraq
01.03.06 Iraq-China
01.03.06 Palestine-Singapore
16.08.06 China-Singapore
16.08.06 Palestine-Iraq
06.09.06 Iraq-Palestine
06.09.06 Singapore-China
11.10.06 Iraq-Singapore
11.10.06 Palestine-China
15.11.06 China-Iraq
15.11.06 Singapore-Palestine

Group F
Bangladesh
Hong Kong
Qatar
Uzbekistan

22.02.06 Hong Kong-Qatar
22.02.06 Uzbekistan-Bangladesh
01.03.06 Bangladesh-Hong Kong
01.03.06 Qatar-Uzbekistan
16.08.06 Bangladesh-Qatar
16.08.06 Uzbekistan-Hong Kong
06.09.06 Hong Kong-Uzbekistan
06.09.06 Qatar-Bangladesh
11.10.06 Bangladesh-Uzbekistan
11.10.06 Qatar-Hong Kong
15.11.06 Hong Kong-Bangladesh
15.11.06 Uzbekistan-Qatar

Top two from each group qualify for finals. Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam qualify automatically as co-hosts

COSAFA CASTLE CUP

Match schedule

Group A
In Maseru, Lesotho
Apr 29: Semi-finals: Mauritius v Angola; Lesotho v Mozambique.
Apr 30: Final & third-place play-off.

Group B
In Gaborone, Botswana
May 20: Semi-finals: South Africa v Swaziland; Botswana v Madagascar.
May 21: Final & third-place play-off.

Group C
In Windhoek, Namibia
July 22: Semi-finals: Zambia v Malawi; Namibia v Seychelles.
July 23: Final & third-place play-off.

Group winners qualify for semi-finals. Bye to semi-finals: Zimbabwe (holders)

CLUB FOOTBALL WORLD

CLUB WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

In Japan

1st round

Dec 11 - Tokyo
Al Ittihad (Sau) 1 (Noor 78)
Al Ahly (Egy) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 28,281. **Ref:** Poll (Eng)
Al Ittihad: Zaid - Al-Dosari, Tukar, A Falatah, Al-Montashari, Haidar (Sowed 64), Abushgeer (Al-Garni 90), Tcheco, Khariri, Noor, Kallon.
Al Ahly: El-Hadary - El-Shater (Ashour 71), A El-Sayed, Gomaa, Mohamed, Barakat, Gilberto (Aboumesallem 46; Hosni 84), Shawky, Moustafa, Moteab, Aboutraika.

Dec 12 - Toyota
Sydney FC (Aus) 0
Saprissa (CR) 1 (Bolanos 47)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 28,538. **Ref:** Kamikawa (Jap)
Sydney: Bolton - Fyfe, Ceccoli, Milligan, Corica (Zdrilic 83), Carney, Packer (Rudan 61), McFlynn (Buonavoglia 61), Miura, Yorke, Petrovski.
Sent off: Ceccoli 81min.

Saprissa: Porras - Cordero, R Gonzalez, J Drummond, Badilla, Benneth (Lopez 83), Bolanos, Centeno (Parks 89), Azofeifa, Gomez, Saborio (G Drummond 90).

Byes to semi-finals: Liverpool (Eng), Sao Paulo (Bra)

Semi-finals

Dec 14 - Tokyo
Al Ittihad 2 (Noor 33, Al-Montashari 68)
Sao Paulo 3 (Amoroso 16, 47, Rogerio Ceni pen 57)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 31,510. **Ref:** Sars (Fra)
Al Ittihad: Zaid - Al-Dosari (Al-Harbi 67), Tukar, A Falatah, Al-Montashari, Sowed (Haidar 64), Abushgeer, Tcheco, Khariri, Noor, Kallon.
Sao Paulo: Rogerio Ceni - Cicinho, Edcarlos, Lugano, Fabao, Junior, Mineiro, Aloisio (Grafite 89), Josue, Danilo, Amoroso.

Dec 15 - Yokohama
Saprissa 0
Liverpool 3 (Crouch 3, 58, Gerrard 32)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 43,902. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)
Saprissa: Porras - Cordero, R Gonzalez, J Drummond, Badilla, Benneth (Solis 46), Bolanos, Centeno, Azofeifa, Gomez (G Drummond 76), Saborio (Aleman 83).
Liverpool: Reina - Josemi, Carragher, Hyypia (Luis Garcia 72), Traore, Gerrard (Sinama-Pongolle 64), Xabi Alonso (Hamann 79), Sissoko, Riise, Cisse, Crouch.

Fifth-place play-off

Dec 16 - Tokyo
Al Ahly 1 (Moteab 45)
Sydney FC 2 (Yorke 35, Carney 66)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 15,951. **Ref:** Kamikawa (Jap)
Al Ahly: N El-Sayed - Abdel Wahab (Flavio 76), El-Nahhas (Mohamed 63), A El-Sayed, Hosni (El-Shater 46), Gomaa, Ashour, Barakat, Moteab, Shawky, Aboutraika.
Sydney: Bolton - Fyfe, Rudan, Talay (McFlynn 78), Milligan, Bingley, Corica (Packer 64), Carney, Miura, Yorke, Petrovski (Zdrilic 86).

Third-place play-off

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Al Ittihad 2 (Kallon 28, Job pen 53)
Saprissa 3 (Saborio 13, pen 85, Gomez 89)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Guezzaz (Mor)
Al Ittihad: Zaid - Tukar (Al-Kahtani 69), A Falatah, Al-Montashari, Abushgeer, Al-Harbi, Tcheco, Khariri, Noor (H Fallatah 87), Job, Kallon.
Sent off: Al-Montashari 87min.
Saprissa: Porras - Esquivel, R Gonzalez (Aleman 80), Parks, Centeno, Bolanos, Solis (Gomez 64), Badilla, G Drummond (Cordero 90), Lopez, Saborio.

Final

Dec 18 - Yokohama
Sao Paulo 1 (Mineiro 27)
Liverpool 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 66,821. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Sao Paulo: Rogerio Ceni - Cicinho, Fabio Santos, Edcarlos, Lugano, Junior, Mineiro, Josue, Danilo, Amoroso, Aloisio (Grafite 75).
Liverpool: Reina - Finnan, Carragher, Hyypia, Warnock (Riise 79), Luis Garcia, Gerrard, Sissoko (Sinama-Pongolle 79), Xabi Alonso, Kewell, Morientes (Crouch 85).

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	6	5	0	1	12	5	15
Bayern Munich	6	4	1	1	10	4	13
Club Brugge	6	2	1	3	6	7	7
Rapid Wien	6	0	0	6	3	15	0

Sep 14 Club Brugge-Juventus 1-2
Sep 14 Rapid Wien-Bayern Munich 0-1
Sep 27 Juventus-Rapid Wien 3-0
Sep 27 Bayern Munich-Club Brugge 1-0
Oct 18 Bayern Munich-Juventus 2-1
Oct 18 Rapid Wien-Club Brugge 0-1
Nov 2 Juventus-Bayern Munich 2-1
Nov 2 Club Brugge-Rapid Wien 3-2
Nov 22 Bayern Munich-Rapid Wien 4-0
Nov 22 Juventus-Club Brugge 1-0
Dec 7 Rapid Wien-Juventus 1-3
Dec 7 Club Brugge-Bayern Munich 1-1

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	6	5	1	0	10	2	16
Ajax	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
Thun	6	1	1	4	4	9	4
Sparta Prague	6	0	2	4	2	9	2

Sep 14 Arsenal-Thun 2-1
Sep 14 Sparta Prague-Ajax 1-1
Sep 27 Thun-Sparta Prague 1-0
Sep 27 Ajax-Arsenal 1-2
Oct 18 Ajax-Thun 2-0
Oct 18 Sparta Prague-Arsenal 0-2
Nov 2 Thun-Ajax 2-4
Nov 2 Arsenal-Sparta Prague 3-0
Nov 22 Ajax-Sparta Prague 2-1
Nov 22 Thun-Arsenal 0-1
Dec 7 Sparta Prague-Thun 0-0
Dec 7 Arsenal-Ajax 0-0

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	5	1	0	16	2	16
Werder Bremen	6	2	1	3	12	12	7
Udinese	6	2	1	3	10	12	7
Panathinaikos	6	1	1	4	4	16	4

Sep 14 Udinese-Panathinaikos 3-0
Sep 14 Werder Bremen-Barcelona 0-2
Sep 27 Barcelona-Udinese 4-1
Sep 27 Panathinaikos-Werder 2-1
Oct 18 Panathinaikos-Barcelona 0-0
Oct 18 Udinese-Werder Bremen 1-1
Nov 2 Barcelona-Panathinaikos 5-0
Nov 2 Werder Bremen-Udinese 4-3
Nov 22 Panathinaikos-Udinese 1-2
Nov 22 Barcelona-Werder Bremen 3-1
Dec 7 Udinese-Barcelona 0-2
Dec 7 Werder-Panathinaikos 5-1

Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Villarreal	6	2	4	0	3	1	10
Benfica	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Lille	6	1	3	2	1	2	6
Man Utd	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

Sep 14 Benfica-Lille 1-0
Sep 14 Villarreal-Manchester United 0-0
Sep 27 Lille-Villarreal 0-0
Sep 27 Manchester United-Benfica 2-1
Oct 18 Manchester United-Lille 0-0
Oct 18 Villarreal-Benfica 1-1
Nov 2 Lille-Manchester United 1-0
Nov 2 Benfica-Villarreal 0-1
Nov 22 Manchester United-Villarreal 0-0
Nov 22 Lille-Benfica 0-0
Dec 7 Villarreal-Lille 1-0
Dec 7 Benfica-Manchester United 2-1

Group E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Milan	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
PSV	6	3	1	2	4	6	10
Schalke	6	2	2	2	12	9	8
Fenerbahce	6	1	1	4	7	14	4

Sep 13 Milan-Fenerbahce 3-1
Sep 13 PSV-Schalke 1-0
Sep 28 Schalke-Milan 2-2
Sep 28 Fenerbahce-PSV 3-0
Oct 19 Fenerbahce-Schalke 3-3

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Oct 19	Milan-PSV	0-0
Nov 1	Schalke-Fenerbahce	2-0
Nov 1	PSV-Milan	1-0
Nov 23	Fenerbahce-Milan	0-4
Nov 23	Schalke-PSV	3-0
Dec 6	Milan-Schalke	3-2
Dec 6	PSV-Fenerbahce	2-0

Group F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	6	5	1	0	13	4	16
Real Madrid	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
Rosenborg	6	1	1	4	6	11	4
Olympiakos	6	1	1	4	7	13	4

Sep 13	Lyon-Real Madrid	3-0
Sep 13	Olympiakos-Rosenborg	1-3
Sep 28	Rosenborg-Lyon	0-1
Sep 28	Real Madrid-Olympiakos	2-1
Oct 19	Real Madrid-Rosenborg	4-1
Oct 19	Lyon-Olympiakos	2-1
Nov 1	Rosenborg-Real Madrid	0-2
Nov 1	Olympiakos-Lyon	1-4
Nov 23	Real Madrid-Lyon	1-1
Nov 23	Rosenborg-Olympiakos	1-1
Dec 6	Lyon-Rosenborg	2-1
Dec 6	Olympiakos-Real Madrid	2-1

Group G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	6	3	3	0	6	1	12
Chelsea	6	3	2	1	7	1	11
Betis	6	2	1	3	3	7	7
Anderlecht	6	1	0	5	1	8	3

Sep 13	Betis-Liverpool	1-2
Sep 13	Chelsea-Anderlecht	1-0
Sep 28	Liverpool-Chelsea	0-0
Sep 28	Anderlecht-Betis	0-1
Oct 19	Anderlecht-Liverpool	0-1
Oct 19	Chelsea-Betis	4-0
Nov 1	Liverpool-Anderlecht	3-0
Nov 1	Betis-Chelsea	1-0
Nov 23	Anderlecht-Chelsea	0-2
Nov 23	Liverpool-Betis	0-0
Dec 6	Chelsea-Liverpool	0-0
Dec 6	Betis-Anderlecht	0-1

Group H

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Rangers	6	1	4	1	7	7	7
Artmedia	6	1	3	2	5	9	6
FC Porto	6	1	2	3	8	9	5

Sep 13	Artmedia-Internazionale	0-1
Sep 13	Rangers-FC Porto	3-2
Sep 28	Internazionale-Rangers	1-0
Sep 28	FC Porto-Artmedia	2-3
Oct 19	FC Porto-Internazionale	2-0
Oct 19	Rangers-Artmedia	0-0
Nov 1	Internazionale-FC Porto	2-1
Nov 1	Artmedia-Rangers	2-2
Nov 23	FC Porto-Rangers	1-1
Nov 23	Internazionale-Artmedia	4-0
Dec 6	Rangers-Internazionale	1-1
Dec 6	Artmedia-FC Porto	0-0

Top two from each group qualified for 1st knockout round; third-placed sides entered UEFA Cup

1st knockout round draw

Ajax (Hol) v Internazionale (Ita)***
Bayern Munich (Ger) v Milan (Ita)*
Benfica (Por) v Liverpool (Eng)*
Chelsea (Eng) v Barcelona (Spa)**
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v Lyon (Fra)*
Rangers (Sco) v Villarreal (Spa)**
Real Madrid (Spa) v Arsenal (Eng)*
Werder Bremen (Ger) v Juventus (Ita)**

**1st leg – February 21; 2nd leg – March 8*
***1st leg – February 22; 2nd leg – March 7*
****1st leg – February 22; 2nd leg – March 14*

UEFA CUP

Group stage – final standings

Group A

Dec 15: Hamburg (Ger) 2 Slavia Prague (Cze) 0; Monaco (Fra) 2 CSKA Sofia (Bul) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	4	3	0	1	6	2	9
Hamburg	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Slavia Prague	4	1	1	2	6	8	4
Viking (Nor)	4	1	1	2	3	6	4
CSKA Sofia	4	1	0	3	5	7	3

Group B

Dec 15: Espanyol (Spa) 1 Maccabi Petach Tikva (Isr) 0; Palermo (Ita) 3 Brondby (Den) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palermo	4	2	2	0	6	2	8
Espanyol	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Lok M'cow (Rus)	4	2	1	1	8	3	7
Brondby	4	1	1	2	5	8	4
M Petach Tikva	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

Group C

Dec 15: Hertha Berlin (Ger) 0 Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 0; Lens (Fra) 2 Sampdoria (Ita) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steaua	4	2	2	0	7	0	8
Lens	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Hertha	4	1	3	0	1	0	6
Sampdoria	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
Halmstads (Swe)	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

Group D

Dec 15: AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 1 Grasshopper (Swi) 0; Middlesbrough (Eng) 2 Litex Lovech (Bul) 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Middlesbrough	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
AZ	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Litex Lovech	4	2	0	2	4	5	6
Dnipro (Ukr)	4	1	0	3	4	9	3
Grasshopper	4	0	0	4	3	7	0

Group E

Dec 14: Roma (Ita) 3 Basle (Swi) 1; Strasbourg (Fra) 2 Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Strasbourg	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Roma	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Basle	4	2	0	2	7	9	6
Red Star B	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Tromso (Nor)	4	1	0	3	7	9	3

Group F

Dec 14: Heerenveen (Hol) 2 Levski Sofia (Bul) 1; Marseille (Fra) 2 Dinamo Bucharest (Rom) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Marseille	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Levski Sofia	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Heerenveen	4	1	2	1	2	2	5
CSKA M (Rus)	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Dinamo Buch'st	4	1	1	2	2	3	4

Group G

Dec 14: PAOK Salonika (Gre) 5 Rennes (Fra) 1; Stuttgart (Ger) 2 Rapid Bucharest (Rom) 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid Buch'st	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Shakhtar (Ukr)	4	3	0	1	4	1	9
Stuttgart	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
PAOK Salonika	4	1	0	3	6	5	3
Rennes	4	0	0	4	1	10	0

Pulling power…Strasbourg's Gaetan Krebs is held by Red Star Belgrade's Dusan Basta during the 2-2 draw on the final matchday of the UEFA Cup group stage

YYePG Proudly Presents, Thx for Support

Group H
Dec 14: Bolton (Eng) 1 Sevilla (Spa) 1; Guimaraes (Por) 1 Besiktas (Tur) 3.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sevilla	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Zenit (Rus)	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Bolton	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
Besiktas	4	1	2	1	5	6	5
Guimaraes	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

Top three from each group qualified for 1st knockout round, where they are joined by the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League group stage

1st knockout round draw

Artmedia Bratislava (Slk) v Levski Sofia
Basle v Monaco
Betis (Spa) v AZ Alkmaar
Bolton v Marseille
Club Brugge (Blg) v Roma
Heerenveen v Steaua Bucharest
Hertha Berlin v Rapid Bucharest
Lille (Fra) v Shakhtar Donetsk
Litex Lovech v Strasbourg
Lokomotiv Moscow v Sevilla
Rosenborg (Nor) v Zenit St Petersburg
Schalke (Ger) v Espanyol
Slavia Prague v Palermo*
Stuttgart v Middlesbrough*
Thun (Swi) v Hamburg*
Udinese (Ita) v Lens

*1st legs – February 15 (*1st legs – February 16); 2nd legs – February 23*

ROYAL LEAGUE

Group A
Nov 24: Midtjylland (Den) 4 Valerenga (Nor) 0; Start (Nor) 2 Hammarby (Swe) 4.
Nov 27: Valerenga 3 Start 1.
Dec 8: Hammarby 0 Valerenga 0; Start 1 Midtjylland 1.
Dec 11: Start 3 Valerenga 3.
Dec 12: Hammarby 2 Midtjylland 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	3	1	2	0	7	3	5
Hammarby	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Valerenga	4	1	2	1	6	8	5
Start	4	0	2	2	7	11	2

Group B
Nov 10: Kalmar (Swe) 1 Brondby (Den) 1.
Nov 24: Lillestrom (Nor) 0 FC Copenhagen (Den) 0.
Nov 27: Lillestrom 0 Kalmar 0.
Dec 8: Kalmar 0 Lillestrom 2; FC Copenhagen 1 Brondby 1.
Dec 11: Kalmar 1 FC Copenhagen 0; Brondby 0 Lillestrom 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lillestrom	4	2	2	0	3	0	8
Kalmar	4	1	2	1	2	3	5
Brondby	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
FC Copenhagen	3	0	2	1	1	2	2

Group C
Nov 24: AaB (Den) 1 Djurgardens (Swe) 3; Lyn (Nor) 1 IFK Gothenburg (Swe) 0.
Nov 27: Djurgardens 0 IFK Gothenburg 1.
Dec 8: IFK Gothenburg 3 AaB 3; Lyn 1 Djurgardens 2.
Dec 11: IFK Gothenburg 1 Lyn 3.
Dec 13: Djurgardens 2 AaB 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Djurgardens	4	3	0	1	7	4	9
Lyn	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
IFK Gothenburg	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
AaB	3	0	1	2	5	8	1

Top two from each group qualify for second stage

AUSTRIA

Dec 10: Salzburg 2 Rapid Wien 0.

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria Wien	21	12	4	5	28	17	40
Salzburg	22	13	1	8	33	24	40
Rapid Wien	22	9	7	6	36	26	34
Grazer AK	21	10	4	7	32	23	34
Pasching	22	9	6	7	27	20	33
SV Ried	22	8	9	5	33	28	33
Wacker Tirol	22	6	9	7	26	30	27
Sturm Graz	22	6	7	9	27	34	25
Mattersburg	22	6	4	12	24	38	22
Admira	22	3	3	16	24	50	12

BELGIUM

Friday, December 9
Germinal Beerschot 2 (Dosunmu 16, Lolo 80)
Lokeren 1 (Bouchouari 34) Att: 4,500

Saturday, December 10
FC Brussels 0
St Truiden 0 Att: 4,000

Cercle Brugge 2 (De Smet 85, Pinas 88)
Charleroi 0 Att: 4,025

La Louviere 0
Westerlo 3 (Ntuka Pule 68, Coelho 85, De Wilde 90) Att: 3,267

Mouscron 1 (Oussalah 36)
Beveren 3 (Dissa 56, 76, Seka 63) Att: 3,857

Zulte-Waregem 1 (Sergeant 19)
Anderlecht 2 (Kompany 30, Wilhelmsson 85) Att: 9,000

Sunday, December 11
Genk 2 (Beslija 23, Peeters 76)
Club Brugge 2 (Verheyen 51, Clement 84) Att: 23,455

Gent 2 (Gregoire 45, Zoko 62)
Standard 1 (Rapajic 13) Att: 9,000

Roeselare 2 (Peeters 20, Dufoor 79)
Lierse 0 Att: 5,250

Wednesday, December 14
FC Brussels 1 (Zaaboub 2)
Roeselare 0 Att: 3,250

Gent 0
Westerlo 1 (De Wilde 81) Att: 6,137

Germinal Beerschot 3 (De Wree 6, Dosunmu 45, Dickson 68)
Beveren 1 (Dissa 71) Att: 6,000

La Louviere 1 (Emeran 21)
Lokeren 1 (Jukic 59) Att: 2,700

Mouscron 5 (Hatchi 48, Noukeu 58, Custovic 63, 84, Dimbala 82)
Lierse 0 Att: 3,631

Standard 2 (Moreira 14, Juhasz og 60)
Anderlecht 0 Att: 25,000

Zulte-Waregem 3 (Sergeant 28, Dhaemers 45, 77)
Charleroi 0 Att: 6,500

Saturday, December 17
FC Brussels 3 (De Camargo 36, 85, Culek 82)
Beveren 1 (Augustin 30) Att: 4,000

Cercle Brugge 2 (Boi 28, Meyssen 32)
Westerlo 2 (De Wilde 10, Janssens 83) Att: 3,900

Genk 2 (Peeters 56, Vandenbergh pen 70)
Lokeren 2 (Bance 1, Drulic 27) Att: 21,063

Germinal Beerschot 0
Charleroi 1 (Sterchele 47) Att: 6,000

Mouscron 0
Club Brugge 1 (Verheyen 9) Att: 5,958

Roeselare 1 (Peeters 63)
St Truiden 1 (Simaeys 1) Att: 4,000

Sunday, December 18
La Louviere 0
Anderlecht 0 Att: 8,000

Lierse 0
Standard 2 (Geraerts 39, Tchite 90) Att: 5,500

Zulte-Waregem 1 (Matthijs 51)
Gent 2 (Zoko 13, Gregoire 65) Att: 6,500

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard	18	12	2	4	30	17	38
Anderlecht	18	10	6	2	40	17	36
Club Brugge	18	10	5	3	28	17	35
Westerlo	18	9	5	4	27	14	32
Genk	18	8	7	3	31	21	31
Zulte-Waregem	18	9	3	6	34	28	30
Lokeren	18	8	5	5	27	25	29
FC Brussels	18	7	7	4	23	17	28
Gent	18	7	4	7	22	23	25
Roeselare	18	6	5	7	29	23	23
Cercle Brugge	18	6	3	9	23	29	21
Charleroi	18	5	6	7	18	24	21
Mouscron	18	6	1	11	25	32	19
Beveren	18	6	1	11	23	30	19
Germinal B	18	5	3	10	22	33	18
La Louviere	18	4	6	8	17	32	18
St Truiden	18	4	3	11	18	29	15
Lierse	18	1	6	11	7	33	9

LEADING GOALSCORERS
12 Mohammed Tchite (Standard)
11 Tosin Dosunmu (Germinal Beerschot)
10 Jackson Coelho (Westerlo)
10 Mbo Mpenza (Anderlecht)

BULGARIA

Dec 9: Lovech 1 Levski 0.

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	14	13	1	0	53	10	40
Levski	14	10	3	1	38	15	33
Lok Sofia	14	10	0	4	26	12	30
Lovech	14	9	2	3	25	10	29
Lok Plovdiv	14	7	3	4	26	21	24
Vihren	14	7	1	6	21	26	22
Cherno More	14	5	2	7	15	18	17
Slavia	14	5	2	7	12	17	17
Beroe	14	4	4	6	19	25	16
Belasitsa	14	4	2	8	15	24	14
Botev	14	2	6	6	11	23	12
Rodopa	14	3	3	8	12	28	12
Pirin 1922	14	2	5	7	10	21	11
Marek	14	2	3	9	9	24	9
Naftex	14	2	3	9	8	26	9

Pirin Blagoevgrad have been demoted to the lower leagues because of failure to pay off debts; results annulled

CROATIA

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	17	14	2	1	47	7	44
Rijeka	18	11	3	4	34	23	36
Kamen Ingrad	18	8	4	6	23	20	28
Varteks	18	9	1	8	30	29	28
Osijek	18	8	3	7	21	28	27
Zagreb	18	7	3	8	16	21	24
Cibalia	18	7	2	9	19	28	23
Hajduk	17	5	7	5	23	16	22
Medimurje	18	5	5	8	21	29	20
Pula	18	5	4	9	21	24	19
Slaven	18	3	6	9	20	31	15
Inter	18	3	4	11	11	30	13

CZECH REPUBLIC

Dec 10: Slavia 1 Teplice 1; Zlin 1 Ostrava 0; Liberec 0 Brno 0.
Dec 11: Olomouc 0 Jablonec 2; Plzen 2 Chmel Blsany 0; Pribram 2 Jihlava 0; Mlada Boleslav 1 Slovacko 0.
Dec 12: Most 0 Sparta 3.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liberec	16	10	5	1	26	11	35
Teplice	16	8	6	2	20	11	30
Slavia	16	7	6	3	29	19	27
Pribram	16	6	6	4	23	17	24
Jablonec	16	7	3	6	24	19	24
Mlada Boleslav	15	7	3	5	24	23	24
Olomouc	16	7	2	7	22	25	23
Zlin	16	6	4	6	16	16	22
Sparta	16	6	2	8	26	27	20
Plzen	16	5	5	6	17	18	20
Ostrava	16	5	5	6	15	17	20
Jihlava	15	4	5	6	12	20	17
Slovacko	16	3	7	6	15	19	16
Brno	16	3	6	7	17	21	15
Chmel Blsany	16	3	6	7	14	27	15
Most	16	4	1	11	14	24	13

DENMARK

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Copenhagen	20	15	4	1	40	13	49
Brondby	20	14	3	3	40	17	45
Viborg	20	11	4	5	38	24	37
OB	20	9	5	6	30	22	32
AaB	20	7	6	7	28	25	27
Nordsjaelland	20	6	7	7	29	27	25
Esbjerg	20	6	5	9	26	30	23
Midtjylland	20	5	6	9	27	39	21
Silkeborg	20	5	5	10	17	32	20
Horsens	20	3	10	7	14	26	19
AGF	20	3	7	10	27	41	16
SonderjyskE	20	3	4	13	26	46	13

ENGLAND

Saturday, December 10
Birmingham 1 (Butt 84)
Fulham 0 Att: 27,597

Blackburn 3 (Dickov pen 56, 57, Kuqi 76)
West Ham 2 (Zamora 45, Harewood 63) Att: 20,370

Bolton 1 (Diouf 82)
Aston Villa 1 (Angel 88) Att: 23,646

Charlton 2 (Bent 42, Ambrose 49)
Sunderland 0 Att: 26,065

Chelsea 1 (Terry 66)
Wigan 0 Att: 42,060

Liverpool 2 (Morientes 72, 77)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 43,510

Newcastle 1 (Solano 82)
Arsenal 0 Att: 52,297

West Bromwich 2 (Kamara 5, Campbell 61)
Manchester City 0 Att: 25,472

Sunday, December 11
Manchester Utd 1 (Giggs 15)
Everton 1 (McFadden 7) Att: 67,831

Monday, December 12
Tottenham 3 (King 57, Hossam pen 85, Defoe 90)
Portsmouth 1 (Lua Lua 24) Att: 36,141

Wednesday, December 14
Everton 1 (Beattie 9)
West Ham 2 (Weir og 19, Zamora 67) Att: 35,704

Manchester Utd 4 (Ferdinand 30, Rooney 35, 55, Van Nistelrooy pen 70)
Wigan 0 Att: 67,793

Saturday, December 17
Aston Villa 0
Manchester Utd 2 (Van Nistelrooy 9, Rooney 50) Att: 37,128

Everton 0
Bolton 4 (Davies 31, Giannakopoulos 74, 79, Speed pen 78) Att: 34,500

Fulham 2 (Diop 44, Boa Morte 51)
Blackburn 1 (Knight og 89) Att: 20,138

Manchester City 4 (Sommeil 1, Barton pen 14, Sibierski 39, Wright-Phillips 69)
Birmingham 1 (Jarosik 75) Att: 41,343

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Portsmouth 1 (Todorov 55)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 20,052

West Ham 2 (Solano og 19, Harewood pen 72)
Newcastle 4 (Owen 4, 42, 90, Shearer 65) Att: 34,836

Wigan 3 (Camara 8, 50, 62)
Charlton 0 Att: 17,074

Sunday, December 18
Arsenal 0
Chelsea 2 (Robben 39, J Cole 73) Att: 38,347

Middlesbrough 3 (Aiyegbeni 30, 43, Queudrue 69)
Tottenham 3 (Keane 25, Jenas 63, Hossam 83) Att: 27,614

Monday, December 26
Aston Villa 4 (Baros 35, 84, Delaney 48, Angel 82)
Everton 0 Att: 32,432

Charlton 0
Arsenal 1 (Reyes 58) Att: 27,111

Chelsea 3 (Gallas 3, Lampard 24, Crespo 74)
Fulham 2 (McBride 29, Helguson pen 56) Att: 42,313

Liverpool 2 (Gerrard 14, Given og 44)
Newcastle 0 Att: 44,197

Manchester Utd 3 (Scholes 35, Ferdinand 45, Van Nistelrooy 63)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 67,972

Middlesbrough 0
Blackburn 2 (Kuqi 38, 79) Att: 29,881

Portsmouth 1 (O'Neil 17)
West Ham 1 (Collins 56) Att: 20,168

Sunderland 0
Bolton 0 Att: 32,232

Tottenham 2 (Keane pen 58, Defoe 90)
Birmingham 0 Att: 36,045

Wigan 4 (Roberts 11, 45, McCulloch 23, Camara 71)
Manchester City 3 (Sibierski 2, Barton 77, Cole 88) Att: 25,017

Wednesday, December 28
Arsenal 4 (Bergkamp 7, Reyes 13, Henry 37, pen 43)
Portsmouth 0 Att: 38,223

Birmingham 2 (Clapham 18, Pandiani 78)
Manchester Utd 2 (Van Nistelrooy 4, Rooney 53) Att: 28,459

Everton 1 (Beattie 42)
Liverpool 3 (Crouch 11, Gerrard 18, Cisse 47) Att: 40,158

Fulham 3 (McBride 13, 61, Helguson pen 32)
Aston Villa 3 (Moore 30, Ridgewell 60, 73) Att: 20,446

Manchester City 0
Chelsea 1 (J Cole 79) Att: 46,587

West Bromwich 2 (Kanu 23, 52)
Tottenham 0 Att: 27,510

West Ham 0
Wigan 2 (Roberts 44, Camara 45) Att: 34,131

Saturday, December 31
Aston Villa 0
Arsenal 0 Att: 37,114

Charlton 2 (Bartlett 21, Bent 63)
West Ham 0 Att: 25,952

Chelsea 2 (Crespo 25, Robben 43)
Birmingham 0 Att: 40,652

Liverpool 1 (Crouch 52)
West Bromwich 0 Att: 44,192

Manchester Utd 4 (N'Gotty og 8, Saha 44, Cristiano Ronaldo 68, 90)
Bolton 1 (Speed 33) Att: 67,858

Middlesbrough 0
Manchester City 0 Att: 44,192

Portsmouth 1 (O'Neil 43)
Fulham 0 Att: 19,101

Sunderland 0
Everton 1 (Cahill 90) Att: 30,576

Tottenham 2 (Tainio 43, Hossam 66)
Newcastle 0 Att: 36,246

Wigan 0
Blackburn 3 (Gamst Pedersen 15, Reid 53, Bellamy 85) Att: 20,639

Monday, January 2
Birmingham 2 (Pennant 20, Melchiot 33)
Wigan 0 Att: 29,189

Blackburn 2 (Gamst Pedersen 9, Dickov 39)
Portsmouth 1 (Taylor 4) Att: 19,521

Bolton 2 (Jaidi 10, Diouf 71)
Liverpool 2 (Gerrard pen 67, Luis Garcia 82) Att: 27,604

Everton 3 (Beattie 9, Cahill 41, 59)
Charlton 1 (Holland 18) Att: 34,333

Fulham 2 (John 43, 61)
Sunderland 1 (Lawrence 7) Att: 19,372

Newcastle 2 (Solano 27, Clark 90)
Middlesbrough 2 (Aiyegbeni 53, Hasselbaink 87) Att: 52,302

West Bromwich 1 (Watson 76)
Aston Villa 2 (Davis 47, Baros pen 80) Att: 27,073

West Ham 1 (Harewood 46)
Chelsea 3 (Lampard 25, Crespo 62, Drogba 80) Att: 34,758

Tuesday, January 3
Arsenal 0
Manchester Utd 0 Att: 38,313

Wednesday, January 4
Manchester City 0
Tottenham 2 (Hossam 31, Keane 83) Att: 40,808

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chelsea	21	19	1	1	46	10	58
Man Utd	21	13	6	2	40	17	45
Liverpool	19	12	5	2	28	11	41
Tottenham	21	11	7	3	31	18	40
Arsenal	20	10	4	6	27	15	34
Wigan	21	11	1	9	25	26	34
Bolton	19	9	5	5	25	20	32
Blackburn	20	9	3	8	26	25	30
Man City	21	8	4	9	27	24	28
West Ham	21	7	5	9	27	30	26
Newcastle	20	7	5	8	20	23	26
Aston Villa	21	6	7	8	25	30	25
Charlton	19	8	1	10	24	30	25
Fulham	21	6	5	10	25	30	23
Everton	21	7	2	12	14	31	23
Middlesbrough	20	5	7	8	25	30	22
West Brom	21	5	4	12	20	31	19
Portsmouth	21	4	5	12	16	33	17
Birmingham	20	4	4	12	15	29	16
Sunderland	20	1	3	16	15	38	6

LEADING GOALSCORERS
15 Ruud Van Nistelrooy (Manchester Utd)
13 Frank Lampard (Chelsea)
11 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Middlesbrough)
10 Darren Bent (Charlton)
10 Thierry Henry (Arsenal)
10 Wayne Rooney (Manchester Utd)

FA CUP – 3rd round (last 64)

Jan 6: Port Vale 2 Doncaster 1.
Jan 7: Arsenal 2 Cardiff 1; Barnsley 1 Walsall 1; Blackburn 3 QPR 0; Brighton 0 Coventry 1; Chelsea 2 Huddersfield 1; Cheltenham 2 Chester 2; Crystal Palace 4 Northampton 1; Derby 2 Burnley 1; Hull 0 Aston Villa 1; Ipswich 0 Portsmouth 1; Luton 3 Liverpool 5; Manchester City 3 Scunthorpe 1; Millwall 1 Everton 1; Newcastle 1 Mansfield 0; Norwich 1 West Ham 2; Nuneaton 1 Middlesbrough 1; Preston 2 Crewe 1; Sheffield Utd 1 Colchester 2; Sheffield Wednesday 2 Charlton 4; Southampton 4 MK Dons 3; Stockport 2 Brentford 3; Stoke 0 Tamworth 0; Torquay 0 Birmingham 0; Watford 0 Bolton 3; West Bromwich 1 Reading 1; Wigan 1 Leeds 1; Wolverhampton 1 Plymouth 0.
Jan 8: Burton 0 Manchester Utd 0; Fulham 1 Leyton Orient 2; Leicester 3 Tottenham 2; Sunderland 3 Northwich 0.

FRANCE

Saturday, December 10
Le Mans 1 (Bangoura 43)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 12,530

Lille 0
Lens 0 Att: 16,768

Marseille 1 (Niang 2)
Auxerre 0 Att: 47,479

Nancy 1 (Zerka 48)
Strasbourg 2 (Pagis pen 37, Diane 54) Att: 16,196

Nice 1 (Kone 47)
Ajaccio 0 Att: 9,627

Paris SG 2 (Pauleta 39, 63)
Rennes 0 Att: 37,747

Sochaux 1 (Isabey 3)
Metz 1 (Ahn 10) Att: 11,813

Toulouse 2 (Bergougnoux 45, Mathieu 90)
Troyes 1 (Grax 6) Att: 16,983

Sunday, December 11
Nantes 0
Monaco 0 Att: 28,275

Saint-Etienne 0
Lyon 0 Att: 35,352

Friday, December 16
Lyon 1 (Govou 69)
Lille 3 (Odemwingie 9, Debuchy 62, Dumont 70) Att: 37,677

Saturday, December 17
Ajaccio 1 (Rocchi 44)
Paris SG 1 (Kalou 42) Att: 3,672

Auxerre 0
Nancy 1 (Zerka pen 6) Att: 7,608

Bordeaux 0
Nantes 0 Att: 21,606

Metz 1 (Borbiconi 60)
Nice 0 Att: 12,186

Rennes 0
Saint-Etienne 1 (Feindouno 67) Att: 28,821

Strasbourg 0
Marseille 1 (Niang 61) Att: 26,022

Troyes 2 (Boucansaud 48, Jaziri 55)
Sochaux 1 (Isabey 90) Att: 18,416

Sunday, December 18
Lens 2 (Aruna 30, Cousin 90)
Le Mans 0 Att: 39,174

Monaco 1 (Kapo pen 85)
Toulouse 0 Att: 9,107

Wednesday, January 4
Le Mans 2 (De Melo 61, 90)
Metz 0 Att: 8,405

Lille 2 (Odemwingie 38, Gygax 90)
Ajaccio 0 Att: 9,865

Marseille 1 (Beye 4)
Lens 1 (Hilton 77) Att: 35,000

Nancy 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 15, 623

Nantes 0
Rennes 2 (Didot 29, Utaka 69) Att: 29,669

Nice 2 (Kone 9, Vahirua 26)
Toulouse 1 (Dao 85) Att: 8,726

Paris SG 3 (Landrin 26, Pancrate 57, Pauleta 73)
Sochaux 1 (Sene 55) Att: 36,806

Saint-Etienne 1 (Hognon 52)
Troyes 1 (Grax 34) Att: 25,641

ESM GOLDEN SHOE STANDINGS AT 08.01.06

POS	NAME	TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Tarmo Neemelo	TVMK (Est)	41	1	41
2	Samuel Eto'o	Barcelona (Spa)	18	2	36
3	Miroslav Klose	Werder Bremen (Ger)	16	2	32
	Luca Toni	Fiorentina (Ita)	16	2	32
5	David Trezeguet	Juventus (Ita)	15	2	30
	Ruud Van Nistelrooy	Manchester United (Eng)	15	2	30
7	Mantas Savenas	Ekranas (Lit)	27	1	27
8	Halil Altintop	Kaiserslautern (Ger)	13	2	26
	Maksim Gruznov	Trans Narva (Est)	26	1	26
	Frank Lampard	Chelsea (Eng)	13	2	26
	Pauleta	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	13	2	26
12	Klaas Jan Huntelaar	Heerenveen (Hol)	17	1.5	25.5
13	Tomas Radzinevicius	Suduva (Lit)	25	1	25
14	Ole Martin Arst	Tromso (Nor)	16	1.5	24
	Alberto Gilardino	Milan (Ita)	12	2	24
	Grzegorz Piechna	Korona (Pol)	16	1.5	24
17	Kris Boyd	Kilmarnock (Sco)	15	1.5	22.5
18	Yakubu Aiyegbeni	Middlesbrough (Eng)	11	2	22
	Jason Byrne	Shelbourne (Ire)	22	1	22
	Ebi Smolarek	Borussia Dortmund (Ger)	11	2	22

For the latest standings, updated weekly, visit www.worldsoccer.com

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Strasbourg 0
Lyon 4 (Wiltord 6, 56, 74, Berthod 42) Att: 19,375

Thursday, January 5
Auxerre 2 (Luyindula 35, Kahlenberg 58)
Monaco 1 (Di Vaio 30) Att: 9,000

Wednesday, January 11
Ajaccio 0
Nantes 2 (Capoue 13, Diallo 24) Att: 3,500

Bordeaux 1 (Alonso 87)
Auxerre 0 Att: 17,965

Lens 1 (Frau 37)
Nancy 2 (Zerka 29, Brison 75) Att: 32,343

Lyon 2 (Tiago 54, Govou 83)
Marseille 1 (Lamouchi 19) Att: 38,912

Metz 0
Saint-Etienne 1 (Helder Postiga 16) Att: 12,273

Monaco 1 (Kapo 73)
Strasbourg 1 (Kante 74) Att: 4,500

Rennes 1 (Briand 52)
Le Mans 0 Att: 20,684

Sochaux 1 (Menez 14)
Nice 1 (Roudet 13) Att: 11,885

Troyes 1 (Keita og 10)
Lille 0 Att: 10,222

Thursday, January 12
Toulouse 1 (Moreira 87)
Paris SG 0 Att: 20,151

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	21	15	5	1	36	14	50
Bordeaux	21	9	9	3	18	11	36
Auxerre	21	11	2	8	28	23	35
Paris SG	21	10	4	7	26	20	34
Lens	21	7	12	2	29	17	33
Lille	21	9	6	6	28	16	33
Saint-Etienne	21	8	9	4	20	13	33
Monaco	21	9	5	7	21	16	32
Marseille	21	9	5	7	23	24	32
Rennes	21	10	2	9	24	30	32
Nancy	21	8	4	9	22	17	28
Le Mans	21	8	4	9	19	17	28
Nantes	21	7	5	9	20	22	26
Nice	21	6	8	7	16	19	26
Troyes	21	6	7	8	19	24	25
Toulouse	21	7	4	10	20	26	25
Sochaux	21	5	7	9	14	22	22
Metz	21	2	8	11	11	30	14
Ajaccio	21	2	7	12	10	27	13
Strasbourg	21	1	9	11	11	27	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Pauleta (Paris SG)
8 Daniel Cousin (Lens)
8 Sylvain Wiltord (Lyon)
7 Peguy Luyindula (Auxerre)
7 Luigi Pieroni (Auxerre)

FRENCH CUP – last 64

Jan 6: Vannes 1 Lorient 2.
Jan 7: Amiens 2 Plabennec 0; Bastia 3 Louhans-Cuiseaux 3 (aet; Bastia 3-1 on pens); Brest 3 Nice 0; Brive 0 Bois-Guillaume 0 (aet; Bois-Guillaume 5-4 on pens); Calais 3 Troyes 2 (aet); Cannes 1 Agde 1 (aet; Agde 4-3 on pens); Chateauroux 2 Yzeure 0; Corte 2 Rennes 3; Dijon 2 Forbach 1; Fontenay-le-Comte 0 AS Vitre 1; Jeanne d'Arc Drancy 0 Metz 4; Le Mans 0 Lens 1; Longuenesse 0 Caen 4; Lyon-la-Duchere 2 Toulouse 1; Montpellier 2 Hyeres 1; Moulins 3 Istres 3 (aet; Moulins 5-3 on pens); Nantes 2 Valenciennes 1; Oissel 1 Sochaux 2 (aet); Roye 1 Alencon 0; Saint-Etienne 0 Lille 1 (aet); Saint-Genevieve 5 Mulhouse 0; Saint-Lo 0 Ajaccio 2; Saint-Louis Neuweg 1 Colmar 2; Saint-Pryve-Saint-Hilaire 0 Entente SSG 6; Strasbourg 4 Nancy 0; Vermelles 0 Paris SG 4; Wasquehal 1 Bordeaux 3.
Jan 8: Grenoble 0 Lyon 4; Marseille 4 Le Havre 0; Noisy-le-Sec 0 Auxerre 1; Rhone-Vallee 0 Monaco 6.

GERMANY

Saturday, December 10
Duisburg 1 (Ahanfouf 43)
Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Vata 53) Att: 19,143

Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Copado 9, Amanatidis 84)
Borussia Dortmund 0 Att: 47,800

Hamburg 2 (Van Burik og 2, Mahdavikia pen 8)
Hertha 1 (Basturk 76) Att: 54,149

Hannover 1 (Stajner 67)
Monchengladbach 1 (Kahe 49) Att: 39,202

Nurnberg 1 (Schroth 29)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Schneider 45) Att: 24,928

Schalke 1 (Kobiashvili 58)
Mainz 0 Att: 61,524

Wolfsburg 0
Stuttgart 1 (Meissner 62) Att: 23,696

Sunday, December 11
Bayern Munich 2 (Ballack 26, Makaay pen 54)
Kaiserslautern 1 (Sanogo 39) Att: 66,000

Koln 1 (Szabics 24)
Werder Bremen 4 (Naldo 34, Klose 50, 90, Micoud 89) Att: 50,000

Wednesday, December 14
Kaiserslautern 1 (Seitz 85)
Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Weissenberger 50, Copado 58) Att: 33,815

Saturday, December 17
Arminia Bielefeld 3 (Kobylik 52, Fink 54, 59)
Koln 2 (Springer 1, Scherz 72) Att: 26,601

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Hannover 0 Att: 22,500

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Kringe 79)
Bayern Munich 2 (Karimi 53, Pizarro 73) Att: 81,000

Kaiserslautern 3 (Altintop 45, 61, 83)
Wolfsburg 2 (Klimowicz 47, Hanke 54) Att: 23,244

Mainz 1 (Da Silva 27)
Duisburg 1 (Mohrle 86) Att: 20,000

Monchengladbach 4 (Jansen 45, Neuville 77, 82, Sverkos 88)
Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Copado 16, 21, Chris 90) Att: 47,598

Stuttgart 2 (Gomez 48, Ljuboja 66)
Schalke 0 Att: 48,000

Sunday, December 18
Hertha 1 (Madlung 86)
Nurnberg 1 (Saenko 55) Att: 30,149

Werder Bremen 1 (Micoud 45)
Hamburg 1 (Kucukovic 67) Att: 42,100

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	17	14	2	1	35	12	44
Hamburg	17	11	5	1	28	9	38
Werder Bremen	17	11	3	3	46	21	36
Schalke	17	8	7	2	20	12	31
Hertha	17	7	5	5	27	24	26
Stuttgart	17	5	10	2	21	17	25
M'gladbach	17	6	7	4	24	21	25
Hannover	17	4	9	4	26	23	21
Dortmund	17	5	6	6	23	24	21
Eintracht F'furt	17	6	3	8	24	27	21
A Bielefeld	17	5	5	7	21	25	20
B Leverkusen	17	4	7	6	24	26	19
Wolfsburg	17	4	6	7	17	29	18
Mainz	17	4	4	9	24	26	16
Nurnberg	17	3	5	9	18	30	14
Koln	17	3	3	11	24	39	12
Duisburg	17	2	6	9	15	31	12
Kaiserslautern	17	3	3	11	23	44	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
16 Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen)
13 Halil Altintop (Kaiserslautern)
11 Ebi Smolarek (Borussia Dortmund)
9 Diego Klimowicz (Wolfsburg)

GERMAN CUP – last 16

Dec 20: Arminia Bielefeld 2 Unterhaching 0; Freiburg 1 1860 Munich 3 (aet); Kaiserslautern 1 Mainz 1 (aet; Mainz 4-3 on pens).
Dec 21: Bayern Munich 1 Hamburg 0 (aet); Hannover 1 Werder Bremen 4; Eintracht Frankfurt 1 Nurnberg 1 (aet; Eintracht Frankfurt 4-1 on pens); Hansa Rostock 1 Kickers Offenbach 1 (aet; Kickers Offenbach 4-3 on pens); St Pauli 4 Hertha 3 (aet).

GREECE

Dec 10: OFI 0 AEK 1; Levadiakos 2 PAOK 2.
Dec 11: Xanthi 2 Kallithea 2; Panionios 2 Atromitos 0; Panathinaikos 2 Iraklis 2; Ionikos 4 Aigaleo 1; Apollon 3 Akratitos 0.
Dec 12: Olympiakos 4 Larisa 0.
Dec 17: Olympiakos 1 Levadiakos 0; AEK 2 Apollon 1.
Dec 18: PAOK 2 OFI 0; Larisa 0 Ionikos 0; Kallithea 2 Atromitos 3; Iraklis 1 Panionios 0; Aigaleo 0 Panathinaikos 2.
Dec 19: Akratitos 2 Xanthi 0.
Jan 7: Panionios 0 Aigaleo 1; Panathinaikos 3 Larisa 0.
Jan 8: Xanthi 0 AEK 0; Levadiakos 1 OFI 0; Kallithea 0 Iraklis 0; Ionikos 0 Olympiakos 1; Atromitos 2 Akratitos 0.
Jan 9: Apollon 2 PAOK 2.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	15	13	0	2	32	7	39
AEK	15	11	3	1	21	7	36
Panathinaikos	15	9	3	3	24	12	30
Xanthi	15	7	4	4	19	14	25
PAOK	15	6	6	3	25	15	24
Iraklis	15	6	4	5	16	17	22
Atromitos	15	6	3	6	17	16	21
Ionikos	15	4	7	4	20	20	19
Aigaleo	15	4	7	4	12	17	19
Larisa	15	4	5	6	16	20	17
Apollon	15	4	4	7	14	21	16
Levadiakos	15	3	5	7	10	15	14
OFI	15	2	6	7	9	19	12
Panionios	15	3	3	9	11	24	12
Akratitos	15	2	4	9	8	19	10
Kallithea	15	1	6	8	11	22	9

HOLLAND

Friday, December 9
Roda JC 0
NEC 1 (Boutahar 72) Att: 12,500

Saturday, December 10
Den Haag 3 (Van der Leegte 6, Kolkka 78, 84)
RBC 0 Att: 6,725

Heerenveen 3 (Bruggink 40, Huntelaar 65, 69)
Willem II 3 (Caluwe 7, Hadouir 13, 26) Att: 20,400

NAC 2 (Vonlanthen 25, Zwaanswijk 30)
Heracles 1 (Jansen 81) Att: 13,699

Twente 1 (Meerdink og 32)
AZ 3 (Huysegems 66, Koevermans 71, Landzaat 89) Att: 13,900

Sunday, December 11
Feyenoord 1 (Kuijt 7)
PSV 0 Att: 45,000

RKC 3 (Martens 64, Hoogendorp 66, Molhoek 70)
Sparta 2 (Polak pen 45, Van den Bergh 90) Att: 5,500

Utrecht 0
Groningen 2 (Salmon 81, Cornelisse 90) Att: 20,215

Vitesse 0
Ajax 2 (Galasek pen 17, Haristeas 75) Att: 24,400

Wednesday, December 14
Willem II 0
Utrecht 1 (Broerse 90) Att: 10,700

Friday, December 16
Sparta 1 (De Fauw 90)
Vitesse 0 Att: 7,256

Saturday, December 17
Heerenveen 3 (Huntelaar 13, pen 49, Nilsson 41)
Twente 1 (Gerritsen 77) Att: 20,500

PSV 4 (Vennegoor of Hesselink 19, 42, Farfan 63, Vayrynen 90)
Willem II 1 (Ceesay 15) Att: 33,100

RBC 0
Roda JC 2 (Bodnar 20, G Van Dijk 43) Att: 4,500

Sunday, December 18
AZ 3 (De Zeeuw 8, Huysegems 17, Steinsson 64)
RKC 0 Att: 8,356

Den Haag 2 (Den Ouden pen 2, Saavedra 79)
Feyenoord 1 (Kalou 68) Att: 8,500

Groningen 3 (Salmon 17, 74, Fledderus 90)
NEC 0 Att: 12,500

Heracles 1 (Hirayama 80)
Utrecht 1 (Fortune 27) Att: 8,253

NAC 0
Ajax 2 (Rosenberg 39, Sneijder 80) Att: 15,933

Monday, December 26
Feyenoord 2 (Paauwe 3, De Guzman 8)
AZ 0 Att: 45,000

NEC 0
PSV 2 (Kone 6, Beasley 90) Att: 11,750

Twente 4 (Niemeyer 23, Zomer 26, 53, Majstorovic 73)
RBC 1 (Sillah 64) Att: 12,250

Utrecht 1 (Van den Bergh 29)
Sparta 1 (Cvetkov 90) Att: 17,500

Tuesday, December 27
Ajax 3 (Rosenberg 7, Haristeas 18, 67)
Groningen 2 (Salmon 80, Levchenko 89) Att: 48,547

RKC 2 (Zuiverloon 7, Martens 43)
Heerenveen 2 (Huntelaar 48, 60) Att: 6,100

Roda JC 3 (Vicelich 76, Oper 82, Bodor 90)
Den Haag 1 (Kolkka 86) Att: 9,500

Vitesse 2 (Amoah 69, 71)
NAC 1 (Van Gessel 52) Att: 19,100

Thursday, December 29
Feyenoord 6 (Kuijt 45, 75, 79, Pardo 50, Kalou 61, 69)
Willem II 1 (Reuser 67) Att: 44,000

PSV 1 (Cocu 70)
Twente 1 (Bakircioglu 41) Att: 33,200

RBC 1 (Sillah 84)
Utrecht 2 (Maachi 30, Tanghe 75) Att: 4,500

Friday, December 30
Heerenveen 4 (Samaras 34, 76, Huntelaar 38, Hanssen 67)
Ajax 2 (Vermaelen 79, Galasek pen 90) Att: 21,200

Heracles 3 (Hirayama 24, Tamerus 33, 39)
Vitesse 1 (Benson 75) Att: 8,397

Roda JC 1 (Oper 10)
Groningen 3 (Buijs 71, Fledderus 83, Nevland 88) Att: 10,000

Wednesday, January 11
NAC 1 (Jenner 46)
RKC 2 (Janssen 40, Hoogendorp 67) Att: 12,874

Willem II 1 (Dembele 41)
Heracles 2 (Sluijter 2, Hirayama 66) Att: 12,650

YYePG Proudly Presents, Thx for Support

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PSV	18	13	3	2	37	12	42
Feyenoord	18	13	2	3	49	19	41
AZ	17	12	2	3	44	17	38
Ajax	18	9	3	6	30	20	30
RKC	18	9	3	6	35	33	30
Heerenveen	18	8	5	5	38	30	29
Utrecht	18	8	5	5	23	19	29
Groningen	18	9	2	7	24	22	29
NEC	17	8	3	6	17	18	27
Vitesse	18	8	2	8	30	28	26
Roda JC	18	7	1	10	27	35	22
Heracles	18	6	4	8	21	34	22
Twente	18	6	3	9	22	22	21
NAC	18	5	4	9	21	31	19
Den Haag	17	5	3	9	19	29	18
Sparta	17	4	4	9	16	25	16
Willem II	18	2	3	13	17	41	9
RBC	18	0	4	14	10	45	4

LEADING GOALSCORERS
17 Klaas Jan Huntelaar (Heerenveen)
14 Dirk Kuijt (Feyenoord)
13 Shota Arveladze (AZ)
12 Rick Hoogendorp (RKC)

DUTCH CUP – last 16

Dec 20: Heerenveen 2 VVV-Venlo 0; MVV 3 Willem II 1; PSV 3 Twente 0; Helmond Sport 2 Ajax '2' 1.
Dec 21: AZ 2 NEC 0; Roda JC 1 Feyenoord 0.
Dec 22: Groningen 3 Volendam 0; FC Eindhoven 1 Ajax 6.

HUNGARY

Dec 10: Ferencvaros 1 Sopron 0; Gyor 1 Diosgyor 2; MTK 3 Vasas 0; Kaposvar 1 Rakospalota 0; Zalaegerszeg 1 Pecs 4; Papa 3 Debrecen 3; Honved 1 Tatabanya 3.
Dec 11: Fehervar 1 Ujpest 1.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ujpest	15	10	4	1	37	16	34
Fehervar	15	10	3	2	23	9	33
Debrecen	15	9	6	0	36	19	33
MTK	15	9	4	2	33	15	31
Diosgyor	15	7	3	5	18	17	24
Honved	15	5	6	4	23	24	21
Tatabanya	15	5	4	6	23	28	19
Gyor	15	5	3	7	23	26	18
Ferencvaros	15	4	6	5	18	20	18
Pecs	15	5	2	8	24	23	17
Zalaegerszeg	15	5	1	9	24	28	16
Sopron	15	4	4	7	18	20	16
Kaposvar	15	4	4	7	13	19	16
Vasas	15	3	5	7	17	24	14
Rakospalota	15	4	1	10	16	30	13
Papa	15	0	6	9	16	44	6

ITALY

Saturday, December 10
Fiorentina 1 (Fiore 52)
Treviso 0 Att: 29,785

Siena 1 (Bogdani 1)
Empoli 0 Att: 8,743

Sunday, December 11
Ascoli 1 (Fini 60)
Reggina 1 (Paredes 88) Att: 7,992

Inter 3 (Adriano pen 24, 90, Martins 59)
Milan 2 (Shevchenko pen 39, Stam 83) Att: 76,416

Juventus 4 (Nedved 9, Trezeguet 17, 52, Vignati og 68)
Cagliari 0 Att: 27,587

Livorno 2 (De Ascentis 59, Peruzzi og 78)
Lazio 1 (Pandev 65) Att: 12,344

Messina 2 (Di Napoli 17, Zampagna pen 45)
Chievo 0 Att: 17,946

Parma 1 (Corradi 25)
Sampdoria 1 (Bonazzoli 84) Att: 17,220

Roma 1 (Cassano 35)
Palermo 2 (Biava 21, Caracciolo 78) Att: 35,316

Udinese 1 (Di Natale 90)
Lecce 2 (Vucinic 36, 57) Att: 15,459

Saturday, December 17
Lazio 1 (Rocchi 16)
Juventus 1 (Trezeguet 26) Att: 38,332

Treviso 2 (E Filippini 30, Pinga 64)
Lecce 1 (Vucinic pen 69) Att: 4,359

Sunday, December 18
Cagliari 2 (Del Grosso og 9, Suazo pen 26)
Ascoli 1 (Biso 55) Att: 7,000

Chievo 2 (Tiribocchi 34, Obinna pen 65)
Udinese 0 Att: 6,589

Empoli 1 (Vannucchi 73)
Fiorentina 1 (Pazzini 70) Att: 12,438

Milan 4 (Shevchenko pen 22, 47, Pirlo 83, Gilardino 85)
Messina 0 Att: 60,434

Palermo 0
Livorno 2 (Pfertzel 67, Morrone 90) Att: 26,151

Reggina 0
Inter 4 (Cordoba 2, Martins 15, Adriano 40, Pizarro 90) Att: 14,629

Sampdoria 1 (Flachi pen 55)
Roma 1 (Totti 15) Att: 22,551

Siena 2 (Locatelli 52, Chiesa 77)
Parma 2 (Corradi 47, Dessena 90) Att: 6,555

Wednesday, December 21
Ascoli 1 (Quagliarella 10)
Treviso 0 Att: 7,747

Fiorentina 1 (Jorgensen 40)
Palermo 0 Att: 29,487

Inter 4 (Adriano 4, Cruz 50, Figo 72, Martins 90)
Empoli 1 (Vannucchi 69) Att: 44,385

Juventus 2 (Cannavaro 13, Trezeguet 56)
Siena 0 Att: 25,587

Lecce 0
Lazio 0 Att: 12,082

Livorno 0
Milan 3 (Gilardino 23, 61, Shevchenko 72) Att: 16,304

Messina 1 (Di Napoli 25)
Reggina 1 (Cozza 89) Att: 19,310

Parma 1 (Corradi 23)
Cagliari 0 Att: 11,160

Roma 4 (Totti pen 32, 39, Perrotta 64, Taddei 85)
Chievo 0 Att: 32,068

Udinese 2 (Zapata 73, Castellini og 81)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 15,379

Saturday, January 7
Palermo 1 (Terlizzi 12)
Juventus 2 (Mutu 15, 34) Att: 33,149

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Reggina 1 (Lucarelli 12)
Fiorentina 1 (Jorgensen 13) Att: 10,255

Sunday, January 8
Cagliari 2 (Sensini og 38, Langella 86)
Udinese 1 (Sensini 23) Att: 5,125

Chievo 3 (Pellissier 20, 52, Zanchetta 90)
Lecce 1 (Del Vecchio 29) Att: 9,329

Empoli 1 (Almiron 35)
Messina 3 (Muslimovic 7, 60, Di Napoli 75) Att: 8,234

Lazio 4 (Di Canio 29, Mudingayi 34, Pandev 73, Tare 81)
Ascoli 1 (Guana 14) Att: 25,174

Milan 4 (Cardone og 27, Gilardino 29, Kaka 35, Shevchenko 81)
Parma 3 (Cannavaro 24, Marchionni 70, 85) Att: 54,358

Sampdoria 0
Livorno 2 (C Lucarelli 8, 90) Att: 23,201

Siena 0
Inter 0 Att: 12,137

Treviso 0
Roma 1 (Aquilani 34) Att: 7,562

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	18	16	1	1	40	10	49
Milan	18	13	1	4	43	21	40
Inter	18	12	3	3	36	14	39
Fiorentina	18	11	4	3	33	18	37
Livorno	18	10	4	4	21	17	34
Chievo	18	8	6	4	23	20	30
Roma	18	7	6	5	28	20	27
Lazio	18	7	6	5	25	23	27
Sampdoria	18	7	4	7	27	25	25
Udinese	18	7	2	9	19	25	23
Palermo	18	5	7	6	25	27	22
Siena	18	5	5	8	23	30	20
Reggina	18	5	4	9	18	27	19
Empoli	18	5	3	10	20	31	18
Ascoli	18	3	8	7	17	24	17
Messina	18	3	7	8	17	26	16
Cagliari	18	3	6	9	16	29	15
Parma	18	3	5	10	19	32	14
Lecce	18	3	3	12	15	31	12
Treviso	18	2	5	11	10	25	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS
16 Luca Toni (Fiorentina)
15 David Trezeguet (Juventus)
12 Alberto Gilardino (Milan)
10 Adriano (Inter)
10 Andrii Shevchenko (Milan)

ITALIAN CUP – last 16

1st legs
Nov 29: Milan 3 Brescia 1.
Nov 30: Atalanta 1 Udinese 0; Parma 0 Inter 1.
Dec 1: Fiorentina 2 Juventus 2.
Dec 7: Bari 0 Palermo 0.
Dec 8: Cagliari 1 Sampdoria 1; Lazio 2 Cittadella 0; Napoli 0 Roma 3.

2nd legs
Jan 10: Juventus 4 Fiorentina 1 *Juventus 6-3 on agg*; Palermo 5 Bari 4 *Palermo 5-4 on agg*.
Jan 11: Brescia 3 Milan 4 *Milan 7-4 on agg*; Roma 2 Napoli 1 *Roma 5-1 on agg*; Sampdoria 2 Cagliari 1 *Sampdoria 3-2 on agg*; Udinese 3 Atalanta 1 *Udinese 3-2 on agg*.
Jan 12: Cittadella 0 Lazio 0 *Lazio 2-0 on agg*; Inter 0 Parma 0 *Inter 1-0 on agg*.

POLAND

Dec 9: Arka 0 Lech 2.
Dec 10: Odra 1 Korona 1; Amica 1 Cracovia 1; Groclin 0 Gornik Z 1; Wisla P 4 Polonia 0.
Dec 11: Belchatow 0 Wisla K 0; Legia 0 Gornik L 2.

POLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wisla K	17	9	6	2	27	12	33
Legia	17	9	5	3	21	11	32
Korona	17	7	6	4	29	22	27
Amica	17	7	5	5	26	18	26
Lech	17	7	5	5	27	26	26
Zaglebie	16	7	4	5	28	22	25
Cracovia	17	7	4	6	21	24	25
Odra	17	6	6	5	16	15	24
Pogon	16	5	7	4	20	17	22
Wisla P	17	6	3	8	20	27	21
Gornik Z	17	5	4	8	19	23	19
Groclin	17	5	4	8	21	26	19
Belchatow	17	4	6	7	16	22	18
Gornik L	17	3	8	6	13	16	17
Arka	17	3	8	6	13	17	17
Polonia	17	3	3	11	10	29	12

PORTUGAL

Friday, December 9
Sporting Lisbon 0
Estrela Amadora 1 (Manu 35)

Saturday, December 10
Nacional 2 (Bruno 39, 90)
Maritimo 1 (Kanu 66)

Uniao Leiria 1 (Fabio Felicio 36)
FC Porto 3 (Laranjeiro og 41, Lopez 42, Diego 90)

Sunday, December 11
Academica 2 (Danilo 55, Marcel 90)
Rio Ave 2 (Chidi 21, Gaucho 57)

Benfica 1 (Anderson 45)
Boavista 0

Gil Vicente 2 (Luis Coentrao 45, Nandinho 82)
Naval 0

Pacos Ferreira 1 (Rui Dolores 45)
Sporting Braga 0

Penafiel 0
Guimaraes 1 (Benachour 89)

Monday, December 12
Setubal 1 (Auri 51)
Belenenses 0

Friday, December 16
Naval 0
Sporting Lisbon 2 (Joao Moutinho pen 37, Fernando og 82)

Saturday, December 17
Belenenses 2 (Rolando 31, Meyong 77)
Pacos Ferreira 0

Benfica 1 (Nuno Gomes 72)
Nacional 0

Estrela Amadora 1 (Anselmo 45)
Uniao Leiria 2 (Paulo Cesar 10, 29)

Maritimo 1 (Rincon 69)
Setubal 0

FC Porto 3 (Gonzalez 40, pen 44, Lopez 54)
Penafiel 1 (Bruno Amaro 1)

Rio Ave 1 (Ze Gomes 62)
Gil Vicente 0

Sporting Braga 2 (Nunes 31, Joao Tomas 64)
Academica 0

Sunday, December 18
Boavista 1 (Cadu 34)
Guimaraes 1 (Saganowski 49)

Tuesday, December 20
Sporting Lisbon 3 (Liedson 32, 53, Tonel 42)
Rio Ave 0

Wednesday, December 21
Academica 0
Belenenses 1 (Meyong 46)

Gil Vicente 2 (Gouveia 49, Nandinho 86)
Sporting Braga 1 (Joao Tomas 28)

Pacos Ferreira 1 (Junior 26)
Maritimo 2 (Rincon 66, 85)

Setubal 0
Benfica 1 (Nuno Gomes 90)

Uniao Leiria 2 (Maciel 41, Harison 90)
Naval 1 (Glauber 32)

Thursday, December 22
Boavista 0
Nacional 3 (Alexandre Goulart 5, Andre Pinto 60, 67)

Guimaraes 0
FC Porto 2 (Ricardo Quaresma 22, Jorginho 58)

Penafiel 0
Estrela Amadora 1 (Semedo 7)

Friday, January 6
Belenenses 0
Gil Vicente 2 (Carlitos 64, Bruno Tiago 84)

Nacional 2 (Andre Pinto 70, 85)
Setubal 2 (Antonio Franja pen 34, Lacombe 90)

Saturday, January 7
Maritimo 2 (Rincon 34, Marcinho 45)
Academica 2 (Joeano 15, Hugo Alcantara 88)

Naval 4 (Saulo 39, Fernando 50, Lito 66, Franco 85)
Penafiel 1 (Jose Rui 73)

Sporting Braga 3 (Wender 32, 79, Joao Tomas 36)
Sporting Lisbon 2 (Liedson 69, 73)

Sunday, January 8
Benfica 2 (Nelson 9, Geovanni 66)
Pacos Ferreira 0

Estrela Amadora 2 (Manu 68, Semedo 71)
Guimaraes 0

FC Porto 1 (Ricardo Quaresma 22)
Boavista 0

Monday, January 9
Rio Ave 1 (Evandro 65)
Uniao Leiria 2 (Milhazes og 10, Alhandra 15)

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Porto	17	12	4	1	29	10	40
Benfica	17	10	4	3	25	12	34
Nacional	17	10	4	3	22	9	34
Sporting Braga	17	10	2	5	19	11	32
Setubal	17	9	3	5	14	7	30
Sporting Lisbon	17	9	3	5	25	19	30
Uniao Leiria	17	7	3	7	22	22	24
Boavista	17	5	8	4	21	18	23
Maritimo	17	5	7	5	20	20	22
E Amadora	17	6	4	7	14	15	22
Pacos Ferreira	17	6	3	8	18	23	21
Belenenses	17	6	2	9	17	19	20
Gil Vicente	17	6	2	9	15	19	20
Rio Ave	17	5	5	7	21	26	20
Academica	17	5	4	8	16	23	19
Naval	17	4	2	11	18	28	14
Guimaraes	17	4	2	11	9	25	14
Penafiel	17	1	4	12	12	31	7

LEADING GOALSCORERS
12 Nuno Gomes (Benfica)
11 Meyong (Belenenses)
10 Andre Pinto (Nacional)
10 Liedson (Sporting Lisbon)

PORTUGUESE CUP – last 32

Jan 11: Aljustrelense 0 Oliveirense 1; Boavista 3 Abrantes 0; Desportivo Aves 1 Sporting Braga 1 (aet; Desportivo Aves 4-2 on pens); Guimaraes 4 Estoril 0; Lixa 1 Ribeirao 0; Louletano 0 Academica 0 (aet; Academica 3-2 on pens); Nacional 2 Fatima 0; Naval 1 FC Porto 2; Paredes 3 Lagoa 1; Pinhalnovense 0 Setubal 0 (aet; Setubal 5-4 on pens); Portomosense 0 Maritimo 2; Souropires 1 Estrela Amadora 3; Sp Covilha 1 Vila Mea 2; Sporting Lisbon 2 Vizela 1; Tourizense 0 Benfica 2.

ROMANIA

Dec 10: Rapid 3 Jiul 0.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	15	10	2	3	36	13	32
Steaua	15	9	4	2	27	10	31
National	15	8	3	4	17	17	27
Poli Timisoara	15	7	5	3	19	9	26
CFR Cluj	15	7	5	3	19	12	26
Arges	15	7	4	4	19	14	25
Rapid	15	7	4	4	19	14	25
Farul	15	7	2	6	21	20	23
Sportul	15	6	4	5	20	17	22
Poli Iasi	15	6	2	7	12	16	20
Gloria	15	5	4	6	13	19	19
Pandurii	15	3	4	8	11	20	13
Jiul	15	2	6	7	10	20	12
Bacau	15	3	3	9	10	22	12
Otelul	15	1	6	8	9	25	9
Vaslui	15	0	6	9	7	21	6

SCOTLAND

Saturday, December 10
Aberdeen 0
Dunfermline 0 Att: 9,881

Celtic 3 (Hartson 40, 65, Maloney 57)
Hibernian 2 (Beuzelin 47, Fletcher 53) Att: 59,895

Falkirk 0
Motherwell 1 (Hamilton 59) Att: 4,972

Hearts 0
Inverness 0 Att: 16,373

Livingston 1 (Snodgrass 42)
Dundee Utd 0 Att: 3,845

Sunday, December 11
Kilmarnock 2 (McDonald 61, Boyd 82)
Rangers 3 (Lovenkrands 16, 42, 72) Att: 12,426

Saturday, December 17
Falkirk 1 (Milne 74)
Kilmarnock 2 (Fowler 50, Boyd 90) Att: 4,804

Hibernian 2 (Fletcher 3, Riordan 90)
Motherwell 1 (McDonald 17) Att: 11,926

Livingston 0
Aberdeen 0 Att: 3,724

Rangers 1 (Lovenkrands 35)
Hearts 0 Att: 49,723

Sunday, December 18
Inverness 1 (Dargo 1)
Celtic 1 (Hartson 21) Att: 7,382

Tuesday, December 20
Dundee Utd 2 (Samuel 25, Robson 41)
Dunfermline 1 (S Wilson 31) Att: 5,889

Monday, December 26
Celtic 2 (Maloney pen 39, Nakamura 87)
Livingston 1 (Dalglish 58) Att: 57,000

Dunfermline 3 (Tod 16, Burchill 23, Darren Young pen 90)
Rangers 3 (Lovenkrands 22, pen 65, Burke 67) Att: 9,481

Hearts 5 (Hartley 20, Skacel 25, Elliot 41, 90, Pospisil 73)
Falkirk 0 Att: 16,538

Inverness 2 (Wilson 8, Dargo 11)
Hibernian 0 Att: 7,017

Kilmarnock 2 (McDonald 38, Wales 90)
Dundee Utd 1 (Samuel 51) Att: 5,749

Motherwell 3 (McDonald 9, 26, McCormack 53)
Aberdeen 1 (Stewart 90) Att: 6,555

Saturday, December 31
Aberdeen 0
Inverness 0 Att: 12,266

Falkirk 1 (Duffy 68)
Dunfermline 2 (Burchill 45, Hunt 58) Att: 6,235

Livingston 1 (Pinxten 37)
Motherwell 2 (Foran 30, McBride 90) Att: 4,431

YYePG Proudly Presents, Thx for Support

Rangers 3 (Buffel 68, Thompson 83, Lovenkrands 86)
Dundee Utd 0 Att: 49,141

Sunday, January 1
Hearts 2 (Jankauskas 6, Pressley 8)
Celtic 3 (Pearson 55, McManus 87, 90) Att: 17,358

Monday, January 2
Kilmarnock 2 (Naismith 30, Wales 90)
Hibernian 2 (Hogg 60, O'Connor 85) Att: 9,224

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	21	16	3	2	53	20	51
Hearts	21	13	5	3	41	16	44
Hibernian	21	12	2	7	36	27	38
Rangers	21	9	7	5	36	25	34
Kilmarnock	21	9	6	6	39	33	33
Motherwell	21	8	5	8	36	38	29
Inverness	21	6	10	5	23	21	28
Aberdeen	21	5	9	7	22	25	24
Dundee Utd	21	5	6	10	22	34	21
Falkirk	21	4	5	12	21	42	17
Dunfermline	21	3	4	14	16	37	13
Livingston	21	2	6	13	12	39	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
15 Kris Boyd (Kilmarnock)
14 Rudolf Skacel (Hearts)
12 John Hartson (Celtic)
12 Peter Lovenkrands (Rangers)

SCOTTISH CUP – 3rd round (last 32)

Jan 7: Alloa 1 Livingston 1; Dundee Utd 2 Aberdeen 3; Dunfermline 3 Airdrie 4; Falkirk 2 Brechin 1; Hearts 2 Kilmarnock 1; Hibernian 6 Arbroath 0; Inverness 1 Ayr 1; Queen of the South 1 Hamilton 1; Rangers 5 Peterhead 0; Ross County 5 Forfar 0; Spartans 3 Queen's Park 2; St Johnstone 0 Gretna 1; St Mirren 3 Motherwell 0; Stirling 0 Partick 1.
Jan 8: Clyde 2 Celtic 1; Dundee 2 Stranraer 0.

Replay
Jan 11: Livingston 1 Alloa 2.

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

Dec 10: Red Star 4 Hajduk K 1; Rad 1 OFK 2; Obilic 0 Habitfarm 0; Buducnost P 1 Smederevo 2; Borac 1 Vojvodina 0.
Dec 13: Buducnost BD 3 Zemun 0.
Dec 15: Zeta 3 Borac 1; Smederevo 0 Partizan 1; OFK 3 Obilic 1; Habitfarm 0 Buducnost P 0.
Dec 17: Zemun 0 Rad 0; Vojvodina 1 Buducnost BD 0; Red Star 4 Jedinstvo BP 0; Hajduk K 2 Vozdovac 0.

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Star	17	14	1	2	46	17	43
Partizan	17	13	1	3	30	13	40
Vozdovac	17	10	3	4	32	18	33
OFK	17	10	1	6	22	11	31
Zeta	17	10	1	6	27	23	31
Vojvodina	17	8	4	5	15	12	28
Hajduk K	17	7	6	4	22	19	27
Buducnost BD	17	7	1	9	15	20	22
Zemun	17	5	5	7	17	22	20
Borac	17	5	5	7	16	21	20
Smederevo	17	6	2	9	16	22	20
Rad	17	5	2	10	17	22	17
Buducnost P	17	3	7	7	14	21	16
Habitfarm	17	3	6	8	9	15	15
Obilic	17	2	4	11	14	31	10
Jedinstvo BP	17	3	1	13	12	37	10

SPAIN

Saturday, December 10
Real Sociedad 1 (Nihat 4)
Villarreal 3 (Guayre 36, 54, Riquelme 72) Att: 16,170

Valencia 1 (Vicente 74)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Etxeberria 57) Att: 45,000

Sunday, December 11
Atletico Madrid 1 (Fernando Torres 66)
Alaves 1 (Sarriegi 81) Att: 40,000

Barcelona 2 (Eto'o 65, Ronaldinho 77)
Sevilla 1 (Kanoute 63) Att: 61,840

Betis 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 35,000

Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Diego Tristan 50)
Cadiz 0 Att: 15,000

Getafe 1 (Pernia 43)
Racing Santander 2 (Antonito 18, Aganzo 85) Att: 13,000

Malaga 0
Real Madrid 2 (Sergio Ramos 34, Robinho 38) Att: 23,000

Osasuna 1 (Webo 5)
Mallorca 0 Att: 14,838

Zaragoza 1 (Ewerthon 76)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 28,000

Saturday, December 17
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Urzaiz 21, Danobeitia 28)
Betis 0 Att: 38,000

Cadiz 1 (Mirosavljevic 90)
Barcelona 3 (Giuly 32, Eto'o pen 45, 48) Att: 22,087

Celta Vigo 0
Deportivo La Coruna 3 (Diego Tristan pen 24, Valeron 42, Capdevila 47) Att: 18,000

Sunday, December 18
Alaves 0
Valencia 1 (Albiol 7) Att: 14,131

Espanyol 2 (Tamudo 48, 82)
Zaragoza 2 (Generelo 51, D Milito 64) Att: 16,190

Mallorca 2 (Iuliano 20, 85)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Maxi Rodriguez 1, Colsa 13) Att: 15,000

Racing Santander 1 (Casquero 45)
Malaga 1 (Navas 39) Att: 13,000

Real Madrid 1 (Soldado 84)
Osasuna 1 (Milosevic 76) Att: 70,000

Sevilla 3 (Kepa 76, 88, Kanoute 81)
Real Sociedad 2 (Labaka 25, Garitano 57) Att: 45,000

Villarreal 2 (Riquelme 45, Forlan 59)
Getafe 1 (Riki 20) Att: 18,000

Tuesday, December 20
Barcelona 2 (Eto'o 38, 57)
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 61,994

Wednesday, December 21
Betis 3 (Fernando 45, Xisco 64, Joaquin 84)
Alaves 0 Att: 30,000

Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Diego Tristan 83)
Espanyol 2 (Fredson 74, Armando Sa 80) Att: 15,000

Getafe 1 (Guiza 37)
Sevilla 0 Att: 9,000

Malaga 0
Villarreal 0 Att: 20,000

Real Madrid 1 (Ronaldo 67)
Racing Santander 2 (Ayoze 21, Felipe Melo 27) Att: 55,000

Real Sociedad 2 (Gabilondo 6, Xabier Prieto pen 75)
Cadiz 0 Att: 14,000

Valencia 3 (Albelda 46, Villa 65, Fabio Aurelio 80)
Mallorca 0 Att: 35,000

Zaragoza 3 (Ewerthon pen 48, 58, D Milito 76)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Lacruz 22, Etxeberria 47) Att: 27,000

Thursday, December 22
Osasuna 2 (Raul Garcia 29, Romeo 33)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Petrov 25) Att: 14,691

Saturday, January 7
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Urzaiz 61)
Deportivo La Coruna 2 (Lacruz og 24, Arizmendi 64) Att: 38,000

Espanyol 1 (Tamudo 60)
Barcelona 2 (Deco 44, Eto'o 47) Att: 28,190

Sunday, January 8
Alaves 0
Zaragoza 2 (D Milito 46, Ewerthon 84) Att: 12,273

Atletico Madrid 0
Valencia 0 Att: 35,000

Cadiz 1 (Mirosavljevic pen 34)
Getafe 0 Att: 18,500

Celta Vigo 1 (Canobbio 24)
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 15,000

Mallorca 1 (Jonas Gutierrez 28)
Betis 1 (Robert 36) Att: 15,000

Osasuna 1 (Delporte 29)
Racing Santander 1 (Antonito 45) Att: 15,421

Sevilla 3 (Maresca 33, Adriano Correia 66, Dragutinovic 68)
Malaga 1 (Salva 49) Att: 40,000

Villarreal 0
Real Madrid 0 Att: 23,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	18	13	4	1	45	15	43
Osasuna	18	12	3	3	26	17	39
Valencia	18	9	6	3	26	17	33
Dep La Coruna	18	9	5	4	26	17	32
Villarreal	18	8	7	3	25	16	31
Real Madrid	18	9	3	6	29	19	30
Sevilla	18	8	5	5	20	14	29
Celta Vigo	18	9	2	7	19	21	29
Getafe	18	7	3	8	23	24	24
Zaragoza	18	5	9	4	22	22	24
Real Sociedad	18	6	3	9	26	35	21
Atletico Madrid	18	4	8	6	18	19	20
R Santander	18	4	8	6	15	21	20
Espanyol	18	4	6	8	16	23	18
Malaga	18	4	5	9	23	26	17
Cadiz	18	4	5	9	12	21	17
Mallorca	18	4	5	9	17	29	17
Betis	18	3	7	8	14	25	16
Athletic Bilbao	18	3	6	9	19	25	15
Alaves	18	2	6	10	14	29	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)
10 Ronaldinho (Barcelona)
10 David Villa (Valencia)
9 Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
8 Diego Tristan (Deportivo La Coruna)

SPANISH CUP – last 16

1st legs
Jan 4: Athletic Bilbao 0 Real Madrid 1; Cadiz 3 Sevilla 2; Celta Vigo 1 Betis 1; Deportivo La Coruna 3 Osasuna 0; Getafe 0 Espanyol 1; Villarreal 0 Valencia 2; Zamora 1 Barcelona 3.
Jan 11: Atletico Madrid 0 Zaragoza 1.

2nd legs
Jan 11: Barcelona 6 Zamora 0 *Barcelona 9-1 on agg*; Betis 0 Celta Vigo 0 *Agg 1-1. Betis on away goals*; Espanyol 3 Getafe 3 *Espanyol 4-3 on agg*; Osasuna 2 Deportivo La Coruna 1 *Deportivo La Coruna 4-2 on agg*; Sevilla 0 Cadiz 0 *Cadiz 3-2 on agg*; Valencia 1 Villarreal 0 *Valencia 3-0 on agg.*
Jan 12: Real Madrid 4 Athletic Bilbao 0 *Real Madrid 5-0 on agg.*

Still to play: Zaragoza v Atletico Madrid

SWITZERLAND

Dec 11: Neuchatel Xamax 0 Grasshopper 0; Thun 0 Schaffhausen 3; Young Boys 1 Basle 6; Yverdon 1 St Gallen 0; Zurich 3 Aarau 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	18	13	3	2	47	22	42
Zurich	18	10	4	4	45	24	34
Grasshopper	18	8	6	4	27	18	30
Young Boys	18	7	7	4	26	24	28
Thun	18	7	3	8	30	33	24
St Gallen	18	6	4	8	29	28	22
Yverdon	18	6	3	9	24	30	21
Neuchatel X	18	5	2	11	24	41	17
Schaffhausen	18	4	4	10	15	28	16
Aarau	18	4	4	10	14	33	16

TURKEY

Dec 9: Manisaspor 1 Kayserispor 0.
Dec 10: Denizlispor 2 Rizespor 0; Galatasaray 3 Besiktas 2; Gaziantepspor 1 Ankaragucu 1.
Dec 11: Erciyesspor 0 Fenerbahce 3; Genclerbirligi 4 Diyarbakirspor 0; Samsunspor 1 Malatyaspor 2; Sivasspor 1 Konyaspor 1; Trabzonspor 2 Ankaraspor 3.
Dec 16: Kayserispor 1 Galatasaray 3.
Dec 17: Ankaragucu 0 Sivasspor 0; Fenerbahce 6 Denizlispor 2; Malatyaspor 2 Gaziantepspor 0.
Dec 18: Ankaraspor 1 Erciyesspor 1; Besiktas 0 Trabzonspor 1; Diyarbakirspor 0 Samsunspor 0; Konyaspor 1 Manisaspor 1; Rizespor 1 Genclerbirligi 1.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	17	14	3	0	43	17	45
Galatasaray	17	13	2	2	39	17	41
Kayserispor	17	9	2	6	30	22	29
Genclerbirligi	17	6	7	4	21	12	25
Besiktas	17	7	4	6	24	19	25
Sivasspor	17	6	7	4	19	17	25
Erciyesspor	17	5	8	4	17	19	23
Trabzonspor	17	6	5	6	21	24	23
Konyaspor	17	5	7	5	22	18	22
Gaziantepspor	17	5	6	6	22	27	21
Manisaspor	17	5	5	7	21	23	20
Ankaragucu	17	4	7	6	19	21	19
Diyarbakirspor	17	5	3	9	16	30	18
Ankaraspor	17	3	8	6	22	24	17
Malatyaspor	17	4	5	8	14	27	17
Rizespor	17	3	6	8	13	23	15
Samsunspor	17	3	5	9	27	37	14
Denizlispor	17	3	4	10	12	25	13

UKRAINE

Dec 10: Tavriya 0 Metalist 1; Volyn 0 Stal 1; Dnipro 1 Arsenal 0; FC Kharkiv 1 Metalurh Z 0; Kryvbas 0 Shakhtar 2.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	19	16	3	0	46	11	51
Shakhtar	19	15	3	1	42	8	48
Illichivets	19	9	5	5	20	19	32
Metalurh D	19	8	7	4	25	13	31
Chornomorets	19	8	4	7	25	19	28
Metalist	19	8	3	8	24	27	27
Volyn	19	8	2	9	25	32	26
FC Kharkiv	19	7	4	8	24	25	25
Dnipro	19	6	5	8	17	20	23
Vorskla	19	6	5	8	17	24	23
Stal	19	5	7	7	16	26	22
Kryvbas	19	5	5	9	15	20	20
Metalurh Z	19	5	4	10	18	28	19
Tavriya	19	5	3	11	13	23	18
Arsenal	19	4	5	10	15	27	17
Zakarpattya	19	2	5	12	11	31	11

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SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

MATCH SCHEDULE

Preliminary round

Colo Colo (Chl) v Mexico representatives
Defensor Sporting (Uru) v Independiente Santa Fe (Col)
Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu) v Goias (Bra)
Nacional (Par) v Universitario (Per)
Palmeiras (Bra) v Deportivo Tachira (Ven)
River Plate (Arg) v Oriente Petrolero (Bol)

Winners qualify for group stage

Ties will be played between January 24 and February 2

Group stage

Group 1
Caracas (Ven)
Cienciano (Per)
Sao Paulo (Bra)
Colo Colo OR Mexico representatives

Feb 8: Cienciano v Colo Colo/Mexican reps
Mar 1: Caracas v Sao Paulo
Mar 7: Colo Colo/Mexican reps v Caracas
Mar 8: Sao Paulo v Cienciano
Mar 14: Cienciano v Caracas
Mar 21: Colo Colo/Mexican reps v Sao Paulo
Mar 28: Caracas v Cienciano
Apr 5: Sao Paulo v Colo Colo/Mexican reps
Apr 12: Caracas v Colo Colo/Mexican reps; Cienciano v Sao Paulo
Apr 20: Sao Paulo v Caracas; Colo Colo/Mexican reps v Cienciano

Group 2
Bolivar (Bol)
Estudiantes (Arg)
Sporting Cristal (Per)
Independiente Santa Fe OR Defensor Sporting

Feb 7: Bolivar v Estudiantes
Feb 9: Sporting Cristal v Indep Santa Fe/Defensor
Feb 15: Indep Santa Fe/Defensor v Bolivar
Feb 21: Estudiantes v Sporting Cristal
Mar 2: Sporting Cristal v Bolivar
Mar 9: Indep Santa Fe/Defensor v Estudiantes
Mar 15: Bolivar v Sporting Cristal
Mar 21: Estudiantes v Indep Santa Fe/Defensor
Mar 28: Bolivar v Indep Santa Fe/Defensor
Apr 4: Sporting Cristal v Estudiantes
Apr 13: Estudiantes v Bolivar; Indep Santa Fe/Defensor v Sporting Cristal

Group 3
Newell's Old Boys (Arg)
The Strongest (Bol)
Union Espanola (Chl)
Goias OR Deportivo Cuenca

Feb 9: The Strongest v Newell's Old Boys
Feb 14: Union Espanola v Goias/Dep Cuenca
Feb 21: Newell's Old Boys v Union Espanola
Feb 22: Goias/Dep Cuenca v The Strongest
Feb 28: Union Espanola v The Strongest
Mar 15: Goias/Dep Cuenca v Newell's Old Boys
Mar 22: Newell's Old Boys v Goias/Dep Cuenca
Mar 29: The Strongest v Union Espanola
Apr 5: The Strongest v Goias/Dep Cuenca
Apr 11: Union Espanola v Newell's Old Boys
Apr 19: Newell's Old Boys v The Strongest; Goias/Dep Cuenca v Union Espanola

Group 4
Corinthians (Bra)
Deportivo Cali (Col)
Universidad Catolica (Chl)
Mexico representatives

Feb 8: Universidad Catolica v Mexico reps
Feb 15: Deportivo Cali v Corinthians
Feb 21: Mexico reps v Deportivo Cali
Feb 22: Corinthians v Universidad Catolica
Mar 9: Mexico reps v Corinthians
Mar 21: Universidad Catolica v Deportivo Cali
Mar 22: Corinthians v Mexico reps
Mar 30: Deportivo Cali v Universidad Catolica
Apr 6: Universidad Catolica v Corinthians
Apr 11: Deportivo Cali v Mexico reps
Apr 19: Corinthians v Deportivo Cali; Mexico reps v Universidad Catolica

Group 5
LDU Quito (Ecu)
Rocha (Uru)
Velez Sarsfield (Arg)
Nacional OR Universitario

Feb 7: Rocha v Nacional/Universitario; LDU Quito v Velez Sarsfield
Feb 14: Velez Sarsfield v Rocha
Feb 16: Nacional/Universitario v LDU Quito
Mar 7: Rocha v LDU Quito; Nacional/Universitario v Velez Sarsfield
Mar 14: Velez Sarsfield v Nacional/Universitario
Mar 16: LDU Quito v Rocha
Apr 6: LDU Quito v Nacional/Universitario
Apr 11: Rocha v Velez Sarsfield
Apr 18: Velez Sarsfield v LDU Quito; Nacional/Universitario v Rocha

Group 6
Internacional (Bra)
Nacional (Uru)
Pumas UNAM (Mex)
UA Maracaibo (Ven)

Feb 8: Nacional v Pumas UNAM
Feb 16: UA Maracaibo v Internacional
Feb 22: Pumas UNAM v UA Maracaibo
Feb 23: Internacional v Nacional
Mar 8: Pumas UNAM v Internacional
Mar 9: Nacional v UA Maracaibo
Mar 16: UA Maracaibo v Nacional
Mar 22: Internacional v Pumas UNAM
Mar 30: UA Maracaibo v Pumas UNAM
Apr 4: Nacional v Internacional
Apr 18: Pumas UNAM v Nacional; Internacional v UA Maracaibo

Group 7
Atletico Nacional (Col)
Cerro Porteno (Par)
Rosario Central (Arg)
Palmeiras OR Deportivo Tachira

Feb 9: Atletico Nacional v Rosario Central
Feb 15: Cerro Porteno v Palmeiras/Dep Tachira
Feb 23: Rosario Central v Cerro Porteno
Mar 2: Palmeiras/Dep Tachira v Atletico Nacional
Mar 14: Cerro Porteno v Atletico Nacional
Mar 15: Palmeiras/Dep Tachira v Rosario Central
Mar 23: Rosario Central v Palmeiras/Dep Tachira; Atletico Nacional v Cerro Porteno
Apr 4: Atletico Nacional v Palmeiras/Dep Tachira
Apr 6: Cerro Porteno v Rosario Central
Apr 13: Rosario Central v Atletico Nacional; Palmeiras/Dep Tachira v Cerro Porteno

Group 8
El Nacional (Ecu)
Libertad (Par)
Paulista (Bra)
River Plate OR Oriente Petrolero

Feb 14: El Nacional v Paulista
Feb 16: Libertad v River Plate/Oriente
Mar 2: Paulista v Libertad
Mar 8: River Plate/Oriente v El Nacional
Mar 16: River Plate/Oriente v Paulista
Mar 23: Libertad v El Nacional
Mar 30: El Nacional v Libertad
Apr 5: Paulista v River Plate/Oriente
Apr 12: Libertad v Paulista; El Nacional v River Plate/Oriente
Apr 20: River Plate/Oriente v Libertad; Paulista v El Nacional

Top two from each group qualify for 1st knockout round

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Final, 1st leg

Dec 6
Pumas UNAM (Mex) 1 (Botero 53)
Boca Juniors (Arg) 1 (Palacio 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 65,000. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)
Pumas: Bernal - Castro, Beltran, Veron, Pineda, Galindo, Palacios, Leandro Augusto, Ailton (Botero 46), De Nigris (Iniguez 46), Marioni.
Boca: Abbondanzieri - Ibarra, Schiavi, Diaz, Krupoviesa, Gago, Ledesma, Bilos (Cardozo 76), Insua (Silvestre 87), Palacio, Palermo (Delgado 86).

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 18
Boca Juniors 1 (Palermo 32)
Pumas UNAM 1 (Marioni pen 55)
Aet. **HT:** 1-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Ref:** Amarilla (Par)
Agg 2-2. Boca 4-3 on pens
Boca: Abbondanzieri - Ibarra, Schiavi, Diaz, Krupoviesa, Battaglia, Gago (Ledesma 71), Bilos (Barros Schelotto 85), Insua, Palacio (Delgado 87), Palermo.
Pumas: Bernal - Castro, Beltran, Veron, Pineda, Palacios, Galindo, Leandro Augusto, Ailton (Iniguez 46), Botero (Cardetti 79), Marioni.

ARGENTINA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, December 9
Velez Sarsfield 2 (Zarate 1, Somoza pen 55)
Instituto 2 (Caprari 9, Barrientos 90)

Saturday, December 10
Arsenal 1 (Tabares 31)
San Lorenzo 2 (Bottinelli 7, Peirone 9)

Estudiantes 2 (Carrusca 16, Calderon 87)
Lanus 2 (Fabbiani 67, Ceballos 82)

Sunday, December 11
Boca Juniors 2 (Palermo 59, Insua 89)
Independiente 0

Colon Santa Fe 2 (Denis 16, Fuertes 55)
Argentinos Juniors 0

Gimnasia LP 0
Newell's Old Boys 0

River Plate 1 (Santana 33)
Quilmes 1 (Caneo pen 6)

Tiro Federal 0
Gimnasia J 0

Wednesday, December 14
Banfield 1 (Sand 88)
Gimnasia LP 1 (Delorte 86)

Independiente 2 (Pusineri 51, Fabro 89)
Rosario Central 2 (Vitti 38, Ruben 78)

Newell's Old Boys 0
Racing Club 1 (Crosa 9)

Olimpo 1 (Blanco 7)
Boca Juniors 2 (Diaz 9, Insua 40)

ARGENTINA – OPENING – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	19	12	4	3	36	17	40
Gimnasia LP	19	11	4	4	28	19	37
Velez Sarsfield	19	10	3	6	26	16	33
Independiente	19	8	8	3	34	22	32
Banfield	19	5	13	1	25	15	28
River Plate	19	8	4	7	31	22	28
Estudiantes	19	8	4	7	23	22	28
Argentinos Jnrs	19	8	4	7	19	20	28
San Lorenzo	19	8	4	7	33	39	28
Colon Santa Fe	19	7	5	7	28	27	26
Racing Club	19	7	4	8	28	27	25
Olimpo	19	5	8	6	19	23	23
Lanus	19	5	8	6	21	31	23
Arsenal	19	5	7	7	23	24	22
Rosario Central	19	5	7	7	20	29	22
Newell's OB	19	5	5	9	25	27	20
Quilmes	19	4	7	8	20	27	19
Gimnasia J	19	3	9	7	23	30	18
Tiro Federal	19	4	3	12	22	31	15
Instituto	19	2	9	8	11	27	15

TOP GOALSCORERS
13 Javier Campora (Tiro Federal)
10 Jose Calderon (Estudiantes)
10 Rodrigo Palacio (Boca Juniors)
10 Leonardo Pisculichi (Argentinos Juniors)
10 Gonzalo Vargas (Gimnasia LP)

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Play-offs

Dec 10: La Paz 5 Blooming 0.
Dec 11: Bolivar 2 The Strongest 2; Oriente 1 San Jose 0.
Dec 14: Oriente 2 La Paz 0; San Jose 1 Bolivar 0; The Strongest 2 Blooming 3.

OPENING PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Blooming	10	6	1	3	20	20	19
Bolivar*	10	5	2	3	22	17	14
Oriente	10	4	1	5	11	16	13
La Paz	10	3	3	4	17	14	12
The Strongest	10	3	3	4	14	18	12
San Jose	10	2	4	4	12	11	10

**3pts deducted for non-payment to former coach*

CHILE

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Semi-finals, 1st legs

Dec 8: Cobresal 2 U de Chile 1; Dep La Serena 3 U Catolica 3.

Semi-finals, 2nd legs

Dec 14: U Catolica 1 Dep La Serena 0 *U Catolica 4-3 on agg*; U de Chile 4 Cobresal 2 *U de Chile 5-4 on agg.*

Final, 1st leg

Dec 18
Universidad de Chile 0
Universidad Catolica 1 (Rubio pen 70)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 50,000. **Ref:** Pozo

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 22
Universidad Catolica 1 (Osorio 5)
Universidad de Chile 2 (Salas 52, Rivarola 73)
HT: 1-0
Agg 2-2. Universidad Catolica 5-4 on pens

COLOMBIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Play-offs

Dec 11: Dep Cali 3 Once Caldas 1; At Junior 2 America 1; Pereira 2 Indep Medellin 4; Real Cartagena 4 Indep Santa Fe 0.

CLOSING PLAY-OFFS – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Cali	6	3	2	1	10	6	11
At Junior	6	3	1	2	7	8	10
America	6	1	3	2	8	9	6
Once Caldas	6	2	0	4	7	9	6

GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Cartagena	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Indep Medellin	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
Indep Santa Fe	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Pereira	6	2	0	4	8	11	6

Final, 1st leg

Dec 14
Real Cartagena 0
Deportivo Cali 2 (Rodallega 51, 76)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Panesso
Sent off: Galarcio (Cartagena) 90min

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 18
Deportivo Cali 1 (Riveros 14)
Real Cartagena 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Ruiz
Sent off: Caldas (Cartagena)
Deportivo Cali 3-0 on agg

ECUADOR

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Play-offs

Dec 10: El Nacional 2 Olmedo 1; LDU Quito 4 Aucas 1.
Dec 11: Barcelona 0 Dep Cuenca 1.
Dec 14: Olmedo 1 Barcelona 1; Aucas 5 Dep Cuenca 2; LDU Quito 1 El Nacional 3.
Dec 18: Barcelona 0 LDU Quito 1; Dep Cuenca 1 Olmedo 0; Aucas 1 El Nacional 4.
Dec 21: LDU Quito 1 Dep Cuenca 1; El Nacional 2 Barcelona 0; Olmedo 1 Aucas 2.

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CLOSING PLAY-OFFS – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Nacional*	10	7	1	2	23	9	25
Dep Cuenca	10	6	2	2	12	10	20
LDU Quito	10	5	2	3	20	13	17
Aucas*	10	3	1	6	17	24	12
Olmedo*	10	2	2	6	7	15	9
Barcelona	10	2	2	6	6	14	8

**El Nacional, Aucas and Olmedo received 3, 2 and 1 bonus points respectively for finishing 1st, 2nd and 3rd in regular season*

PARAGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 10: General Caballero 1 Cerro Porteno 3; Libertad 4 12 de Octubre 1; Nacional 2 Sportivo Luqueno 1; Olimpia 0 Guarani 2; Tacuary 6 3 de Febrero 3.

PARAGUAY – CLOSING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	18	11	3	4	34	20	36
Libertad	18	9	5	4	30	23	32
Olimpia	18	9	4	5	29	20	31
3 de Febrero	18	8	4	6	31	25	28
Nacional	18	7	6	5	24	20	27
Sp Luqueno	18	6	7	5	27	26	25
Tacuary	18	6	6	6	26	31	24
Guarani	18	6	2	10	18	25	20
12 de Octubre	18	2	8	8	18	33	14
Gen Caballero	18	3	1	14	15	29	10

PERU

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 10: Sport Ancash 3 At Universidad 2; Universidad CV 2 Alianza Atletico 3.
Dec 11: Alianza Lima 2 Cienciano 0; Coronel Bolognesi 1 Sporting Cristal 2; Melgar 3 Union Huaral 1; Universidad SMP 1 Universitario 0.
Dec 14: Sporting Cristal 1 Universidad CV 1; Alianza Atletico 1 Universidad SMP 4; Cienciano 0 Coronel Bolognesi 1; Universitario 1 Sport Ancash 0; At Universidad 2 Sport Boys 0; Union Huaral 0 Alianza Lima 2.
Dec 17: Sport Ancash 1 Alianza Atletico 0; Alianza Lima 1 Melgar 0; Universidad SMP 1 Sporting Cristal 0; Universidad CV 1 Cienciano 1.
Dec 18: Coronel Bolognesi 2 Union Huaral 2; Sport Boys 0 Universitario 0.

PERU – CLOSING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting Cristal	24	15	7	2	37	13	52
Univ SMP	24	14	6	4	40	20	48
C Bolognesi	24	14	2	8	38	32	44
Universitario	24	11	7	6	31	20	40
Cienciano	24	9	6	9	33	30	33
Sport Ancash	24	9	5	10	27	32	32
Melgar	24	9	5	10	26	37	32
At Universidad	24	9	4	11	35	39	31
Alianza Atletico	24	9	3	12	29	39	30
Sport Boys	24	7	7	10	23	30	28
Alianza Lima	24	7	5	12	26	23	26
Univ CV	24	5	7	12	31	39	22
Union Huaral	24	4	4	16	16	38	16

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 7: Tacuarembo 2 Danubio 3.
Dec 10: Paysandu 1 Dep Colonia 5; Cerro 2 Rentistas 2; Fenix 1 Rampla Juniors 3; Plaza 0 Miramar Misiones 0.
Dec 11: River Plate 2 Defensor 2; Liverpool 0 Cerrito 1; Penarol 4 Rocha 4; Wanderers 3 Tacuarembo 1.
Dec 17: Danubio 3 Nacional 4.

URUGUAY – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rocha	17	10	3	4	37	25	33
Nacional*	17	9	7	1	32	16	31
Danubio	17	8	3	6	36	25	27
Rampla Jnrs	17	8	2	7	35	25	26
Dep Colonia	17	6	8	3	23	19	26
Cerrito	17	6	7	4	20	18	25
Penarol	17	6	7	4	22	26	25
River Plate	17	6	6	5	24	22	24
Rentistas	17	7	3	7	21	22	24
Liverpool	17	5	7	5	19	18	22
Defensor	17	5	7	5	21	21	22
Cerro	17	5	7	5	23	25	22
Plaza	17	5	6	6	15	23	21
Wanderers	17	4	8	5	27	32	20
M Misiones	17	3	9	5	18	18	18
Tacuarembo	17	4	5	8	13	21	17
Fenix	17	3	4	10	22	31	13
Paysandu	17	1	5	11	18	39	8

**3pts deducted for crowd trouble during home game against Penarol in the 2004 closing championship*

VENEZUELA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Dec 10: Monagas 0 Mineros Guayana 3.
Dec 11: Aragua 0 UA Maracaibo 0; Trujillanos 1 Dep Tachira 1; Caracas 2 Estudiantes 1; ItalMaracaibo 2 Carabobo 2.
Dec 17: Dep Tachira 1 Monagas 1.
Dec 18: Estudiantes 1 ItalMaracaibo 3; Caracas 0 Mineros Guayana 1; UA Maracaibo 4 Trujillanos 0.
Dec 19: Carabobo 3 Aragua 0.

VENEZUELA – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UA Maracaibo	18	12	5	1	28	11	41
Dep Tachira	18	9	4	5	32	23	31
Mineros G'ana	18	7	6	5	24	19	27
Carabobo	18	7	6	5	28	24	27
Caracas	18	7	3	8	28	25	24
ItalMaracaibo	18	6	6	6	23	22	24
Aragua	18	6	4	8	16	27	22
Trujillanos	18	4	6	8	14	24	18
Estudiantes	18	3	6	9	21	30	15
Monagas	18	3	6	9	19	28	15

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Jan 8: Carabobo 3 Estudiantes 2; Monagas 0 UA Maracaibo 0; ItalMaracaibo 0 Mineros Guayana 2; Trujillanos 1 Aragua 0; Caracas 0 Dep Tachira 0.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mineros G'ana	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Carabobo	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Trujillanos	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Caracas	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
UA Maracaibo	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Monagas	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dep Tachira	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Estudiantes	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Aragua	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
ItalMaracaibo	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS CUP

Quarter-finals draw

Los Angeles Galaxy (USA) v Saprissa (CR)
New England Revolution (USA) v Alajuelense (CR)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Toluca (Mex)
Portmore Utd (Jam) v America (Mex)

1st legs – February 22; 2nd legs – March 8

MEXICO

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Semi-finals, 1st legs

Dec 7: Tigres 1 Monterrey 0.
Dec 8: Pachuca 0 Toluca 0.

Semi-finals, 2nd legs

Dec 10: Monterrey 2 Tigres 1 *Agg 2-2. Monterrey qualified on better record during league stage.*
Dec 11: Toluca 2 Pachuca 1 *Toluca 2-1 on agg.*

Final, 1st leg

Dec 15
Toluca 3 (Sanchez 32, Abundis 45, Diaz 87)
Monterrey 3 (Perez pen 3, Casartelli 8, Da Silva og 61)
HT: 2-2. **Ref:** Alcala

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 18
Monterrey 0
Toluca 3 (Sanchez 50, 90, Diaz 90)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rodriguez
Sent off: Serafin 14min, Gonzalez 48min, Perez 81min (all Monterrey)
Toluca 6-3 on agg

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round draw

Renaicemento (EqG) v Africa Sport (IvC)
Stade Malien (Mli) v Satellite (Gui)
Kenya representatives v Red Sea (Eri)
RC Kadiogo (BuF) v USM Alger (Alg)
AS Douanes (Tog) v Port Autonome (Sen)
Civics (Nam) v Sagrada Esperanca (Ang)
East End Lions (SLe) v ASEC Abidjan (IvC)
Mbabane Swallows (Swa) v Orlando Pirates (SAf)
AS Port Louis 2000 (Mrs) v Coin Nord Mitsamiouli (Com)
Police (Uga) v Al Hilal (Sud)
Police XI (Bot) v Enugu Rangers (Nig)
Mangasport (Gab) v Enyimba (Nig)
LPRC Oilers (Lbr) v Diaraf Dakar (Sen)
Renaissance FC (Chd) v Cotonsport (Cam)
FC St Eloi Lupopo (DRC) v AS Police (Con)
Central African Republic representatives v Daring Club Motema Pembe (DRC)
AS FNIS (Ngr) v CS Sfaxien (Tun)
APR FC (Rwa) v AS Aviacao (Ang)
Aigle Royal Menoua (Cam) v Asante Kotoko (Gha)
La Passe (Sey) v Ferroviario Maputo (Moz)
Likhopo (Les) v Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf)
Excelsior St Joseph (Reu) v USCAFOOT (Mad)
Wallidan (Gam) v Hearts of Oak (Gha)
St George (Eth) v ENPPI (Egy)
AS Polisi (Zan) v Civo United (Mwi)
Al Ittihad (Lby) v JS Kabylie (Alg)
Young Africans (Tan) v ZANACO (Zam)
Inter Stars (Brd) v CAPS United (Zim)
ASC Ahmedi (Mau) v Raja Casablanca (Mor)

1st legs – February 17/18/19;
2nd legs – March 3/4/5

Byes to 2nd round: Al Ahly (Egy), Etoile Sahel (Tun), FAR Rabat (Mor)

2nd round draw

Stade Malien or Satellite v Renaicemento or Africa Sport
Kenya representatives or Red Sea v Al Ahly
AS Douanes or Port Autonome v RC Kadiogo or USM Alger
East End Lions or ASEC Abidjan v Civics or Sagrada Esperanca
AS Port Louis 2000 or Coin Nord Mitsamiouli v Mbabane Swallows or Orlando Pirates
Police XI or Enugu Rangers v Police or Al Hilal
LPRC Oilers or Diaraf Dakar v Mangasport or Enyimba
FC St Eloi Lupopo or AS Police v Renaissance FC or Cotonsport
AS FNIS or CS Sfaxien v Central African Republic representatives or Daring Club Motema Pembe
APR FC or AS Aviacao v FAR Rabat
La Passe or Ferroviario Maputo v Aigle Royal Menoua or Asante Kotoko
Excelsior St Joseph or USCAFOOT v Likhopo or Mamelodi Sundowns
St George or ENPPI v Wallidan or Hearts of Oak
AS Polisi or Civo United v Etoile Sahel
Young Africans or ZANACO v Al Ittihad or JS Kabylie
ASC Ahmedi or Raja Casablanca v Inter Stars or CAPS United

1st legs – March 17/18/19;
2nd legs – March 31/April 1/2

CONFEDERATION CUP

1st round draw

ASC Entente (Mau) v ASO Chlef (Alg)
Sahel SC (Ngr) v Sewe Sport (IvC)
Esperance Zarzis (Tun) v US Ouagadougou (BuF)
Akonangui (EqG) v Cameroon representatives
TP USCA Bangui (CAR) v Astres Douala (Cam)
Tourbillon (Chd) v Diables Noirs (Con)
Bakau United (Gam) v Jeunesse Club Abidjan (IvC)
Al Akhdar (Lby) v Harass Al Hodoud (Egy)
Rayon Sports (Rwa) v Awassa City (Eth)
Mighty Blackpool (SLe) v Compaigne Sucre Senegalaise (Sen)
Kenya representatives v Uganda Revenue Authority (Uga)
Dyto (Tog) v AS Bamako (Mli)
AS Kabasha (DRC) v Sogea (Gab)
SMB (Sey) v Township Rollers (Bot)
ZESCO (Zam) v Pointe aux Sable Mates (Mrs)
Zimbabwe representatives v Moro United (Tan)
Ferroviario Beira (Moz) v Elan Club Mitsoudje (Com)
JKU (Zan) v USJF Ravinala (Mad)

1st legs – February 17/18/19;
2nd legs – March 3/4/5

Byes to 2nd round: Al Ittihad (Egy), Al Merreikh (Sud), AS Douanes (Sen), AS Kaloum (Gui), Berekum Arsenal (Gha), Esperance (Tun), InterClube (Ang), Iwuanyanwu Nationale (Nig), King Faisal Babes (Gha), Lobi Stars (Nig), NA Hussein-Dey (Alg), Olympique Khouribga (Mor), Petro Atletico (Ang), TP Mazembe Englebert (DRC)

2nd round draw

ASC Entente or ASO Chlef v AS Douanes
Sahel SC or Sewe Sport v NA Hussein-Dey
Esperance Zarzis or US Ouagadougou v Olympique Khouribga
Akonangui or Cameroon representatives v Lobi Stars
TP USCA Bangui or Astres Douala v Petro Atletico
Tourbillon or Diables Noirs v Berekum Arsenal
Bakau United or Jeunesse Club Abidjan v Iwuanyanwu Nationale
Al Akhdar or Harass Al Hodoud v AS Kaloum
Rayon Sports or Awassa City v Al Ittihad
Mighty Blackpool or Compaigne Sucre Senegalaise v Esperance
Kenya representatives or Uganda Revenue Authority v Al Merreikh
Dyto or AS Bamako v King Faisal Babes
AS Kabasha or Sogea v InterClube
ZESCO or Pointe aux Sable Mates v SMB or Township Rollers
Zimbabwe representatives or Moro United v TP Mazembe Englebert
JKU or USJF Ravinala v Ferroviario Beira or Elan Club Mitsoudje

1st legs – March 17/18/19;
2nd legs – March 31/ April 1/2

ASIA

JAPAN

EMPEROR'S CUP – Final

Jan 1 - National stadium, Tokyo
Urawa Reds 2 (Horinouchi 40, Maric 74)
Shimizu S-Pulse 1 (Ichikawa 77)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 51,536
Sent off: Hiramatsu (Shimizu) 85min

SOUTH KOREA

FA CUP – Final

Dec 17 - World Cup stadium, Seoul
Ulsan Mipo Dockyard 0
Chonbuk Hyundai 1 (Rodriguez 13)
HT: 0-1

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FIXTURES

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Sat, January 28
Arsenal v Argentinos Juniors
Banfield v Racing Club
Colon Santa Fe v Gimnasia LP
Estudiantes v Instituto
Gimnasia J v Boca Juniors
Independiente v Lanus
Newell's Old Boys v Quilmes
Olimpo v Rosario Central
Tiro Federal v River Plate
Velez Sarsfield v San Lorenzo

Tue, January 31
Argentinos Juniors v Velez Sarsfield
Gimnasia LP v Arsenal
Instituto v Independiente
Lanus v Olimpo
Quilmes v Banfield
Racing Club v Colon Santa Fe
River Plate v Gimnasia J
Rosario Central v Boca Juniors
San Lorenzo v Estudiantes
Tiro Federal v Newell's Old Boys

Sun, February 5
Arsenal v Racing Club
Banfield v Tiro Federal
Boca Juniors v Lanus
Colon Santa Fe v Quilmes
Estudiantes v Argentinos Juniors
Gimnasia J v Rosario Central
Independiente v San Lorenzo
Newell's Old Boys v River Plate
Olimpo v Instituto
Velez Sarsfield v Gimnasia LP

Sun, February 12
Argentinos Juniors v Independiente
Gimnasia LP v Estudiantes
Instituto v Boca Juniors
Lanus v Rosario Central
Newell's Old Boys v Gimnasia J
Quilmes v Arsenal
Racing Club v Velez Sarsfield
River Plate v Banfield
San Lorenzo v Olimpo
Tiro Federal v Colon Santa Fe

Sun, February 19
Arsenal v Tiro Federal
Banfield v Newell's Old Boys
Boca Juniors v San Lorenzo
Colon Santa Fe v River Plate
Estudiantes v Racing Club
Gimnasia J v Lanus
Independiente v Gimnasia LP
Olimpo v Argentinos Juniors
Rosario Central v Instituto
Velez Sarsfield v Quilmes

Sun, February 26
Argentinos Juniors v Boca Juniors
Banfield v Gimnasia J
Gimnasia LP v Olimpo
Instituto v Lanus
Newell's Old Boys v Colon Santa Fe
Quilmes v Estudiantes
Racing Club v Independiente
River Plate v Arsenal
San Lorenzo v Rosario Central
Tiro Federal v Velez Sarsfield

Wed, March 1
Arsenal v Newell's Old Boys
Boca Juniors v Gimnasia LP
Colon Santa Fe v Banfield
Estudiantes v Tiro Federal
Gimnasia J v Instituto
Independiente v Quilmes
Lanus v San Lorenzo
Olimpo v Racing Club
Rosario Central v Argentinos Juniors
Velez Sarsfield v River Plate

Sun, March 5
Argentinos Juniors v Lanus
Banfield v Arsenal
Colon Santa Fe v Gimnasia J
Gimnasia LP v Rosario Central
Newell's Old Boys v Velez Sarsfield
Quilmes v Olimpo
Racing Club v Boca Juniors
River Plate v Estudiantes
San Lorenzo v Instituto
Tiro Federal v Independiente

Sun, March 12
Arsenal v Colon Santa Fe
Boca Juniors v Quilmes
Estudiantes v Newell's Old Boys
Gimnasia J v San Lorenzo
Independiente v River Plate
Instituto v Argentinos Juniors
Lanus v Gimnasia LP
Olimpo v Tiro Federal
Rosario Central v Racing Club
Velez Sarsfield v Banfield

Sun, March 19
Argentinos Juniors v San Lorenzo
Arsenal v Gimnasia J
Banfield v Estudiantes
Colon Santa Fe v Velez Sarsfield
Gimnasia LP v Instituto
Newell's Old Boys v Independiente
Quilmes v Rosario Central
Racing Club v Lanus
River Plate v Olimpo
Tiro Federal v Boca Juniors

Sun, March 26
Boca Juniors v River Plate
Estudiantes v Colon Santa Fe
Gimnasia J v Argentinos Juniors
Independiente v Banfield
Instituto v Racing Club
Lanus v Quilmes
Olimpo v Newell's Old Boys
Rosario Central v Tiro Federal
San Lorenzo v Gimnasia LP
Velez Sarsfield v Arsenal

Wed, March 29
Arsenal v Estudiantes
Banfield v Olimpo
Colon Santa Fe v Independiente
Gimnasia LP v Argentinos Juniors
Newell's Old Boys v Boca Juniors
Quilmes v Instituto
Racing Club v San Lorenzo
River Plate v Rosario Central
Tiro Federal v Lanus
Velez Sarsfield v Gimnasia J

Sun, April 2
Argentinos Juniors v Racing Club
Boca Juniors v Banfield
Estudiantes v Velez Sarsfield
Gimnasia J v Gimnasia LP
Independiente v Arsenal
Instituto v Tiro Federal
Lanus v River Plate
Olimpo v Colon Santa Fe
Rosario Central v Newell's Old Boys
San Lorenzo v Quilmes

Sun, April 9
Arsenal v Olimpo
Banfield v Rosario Central
Colon Santa Fe v Boca Juniors
Estudiantes v Gimnasia J
Newell's Old Boys v Lanus
Quilmes v Argentinos Juniors
Racing Club v Gimnasia LP
River Plate v Instituto
Tiro Federal v San Lorenzo
Velez Sarsfield v Independiente

Sun, April 16
Argentinos Juniors v Tiro Federal
Boca Juniors v Arsenal
Gimnasia J v Racing Club
Gimnasia LP v Quilmes
Independiente v Estudiantes
Instituto v Newell's Old Boys
Lanus v Banfield
Olimpo v Velez Sarsfield
Rosario Central v Colon Santa Fe
San Lorenzo v River Plate

Sun, April 23
Arsenal v Rosario Central
Banfield v Instituto
Colon Santa Fe v Lanus
Estudiantes v Olimpo
Independiente v Gimnasia J
Newell's Old Boys v San Lorenzo
Quilmes v Racing Club
River Plate v Argentinos Juniors
Tiro Federal v Gimnasia LP
Velez Sarsfield v Boca Juniors

Sun, April 30
Argentinos Juniors v Newell's Old Boys
Boca Juniors v Estudiantes
Gimnasia J v Quilmes
Gimnasia LP v River Plate
Instituto v Colon Santa Fe
Lanus v Arsenal
Olimpo v Independiente
Racing Club v Tiro Federal
Rosario Central v Velez Sarsfield
San Lorenzo v Banfield

Sun, May 7
Arsenal v Instituto
Banfield v Argentinos Juniors
Colon Santa Fe v San Lorenzo
Estudiantes v Rosario Central
Independiente v Boca Juniors
Newell's Old Boys v Gimnasia LP
Olimpo v Gimnasia J
River Plate v Racing Club
Tiro Federal v Quilmes
Velez Sarsfield v Lanus

Sun, May 14
Argentinos Juniors v Colon Santa Fe
Boca Juniors v Olimpo
Gimnasia J v Tiro Federal
Gimnasia LP v Banfield
Instituto v Velez Sarsfield
Lanus v Estudiantes
Quilmes v River Plate
Racing Club v Newell's Old Boys
Rosario Central v Independiente
San Lorenzo v Arsenal

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Sat, January 21
Toluca v Necaxa
Jaguares v Guadalajara
Atlante v Dorados
Morelia v Cruz Azul
Tigres v America
Atlas v Veracruz

Sun, January 22
Pumas UNAM v Santos
Pachuca v Monterrey
Tecos UAG v San Luis

Sat, January 28
Cruz Azul v Atlas
Monterrey v Morelia
Veracruz v Tecos UAG
Guadalajara v Pumas UNAM
Dorados v Tigres
Necaxa v Jaguares

Sun, January 29
San Luis v Toluca
Santos v Atlante
America v Pachuca

Wed, February 1
Toluca v Veracruz
Tigres v Santos
Tecos UAG v Cruz Azul
Jaguares v San Luis
Atlas v Monterrey
Atlante v Guadalajara
Pumas UNAM v Necaxa
Dorados v America
Morelia v Pachuca

Sat, February 4
Cruz Azul v Toluca
Monterrey v Tecos UAG
Guadalajara v Tigres
Veracruz v Jaguares
Necaxa v Atlante

Sun, February 5
San Luis v Pumas UNAM
Pachuca v Atlas
America v Morelia
Santos v Dorados

Sat, February 11
Toluca v Monterrey
Jaguares v Cruz Azul
Atlante v San Luis
Dorados v Guadalajara
Tigres v Necaxa
Atlas v Morelia

Sun, February 12
Pumas UNAM v Veracruz
Santos v America
Tecos UAG v Pachuca

Sat, February 18
Cruz Azul v Pumas UNAM
Monterrey v Jaguares
Veracruz v Atlante
Guadalajara v Santos
Morelia v Tecos UAG
Necaxa v Dorados

Sun, February 19
San Luis v Tigres
Pachuca v Toluca
America v Atlas

Sat, February 25
Toluca v Morelia
Jaguares v Pachuca
Atlante v Cruz Azul
Dorados v San Luis
Tigres v Veracruz
Guadalajara v America

Sun, February 26
Pumas UNAM v Monterrey
Santos v Necaxa
Tecos UAG v Atlas

Sat, March 4
Cruz Azul v Tigres
Monterrey v Atlante
Morelia v Jaguares
Veracruz v Dorados
Necaxa v Guadalajara
Atlas v Toluca

Sun, March 5
San Luis v Santos
Pachuca v Pumas UNAM
America v Tecos UAG

Sat, March 11
Toluca v Tecos UAG
Jaguares v Atlas
Atlante v Pachuca
Dorados v Cruz Azul
Tigres v Monterrey
Guadalajara v San Luis
Necaxa v America

Sun, March 12
Pumas UNAM v Morelia
Santos v Veracruz

Wed, March 15
Atlas v Pumas UNAM
America v Toluca
Cruz Azul v Santos
San Luis v Necaxa
Veracruz v Guadalajara
Monterrey v Dorados
Pachuca v Tigres
Morelia v Atlante
Tecos UAG v Jaguares

Sat, March 18
Jaguares v Toluca
Atlante v Atlas
Tigres v Morelia
Guadalajara v Cruz Azul
Dorados v Pachuca
Necaxa v Veracruz

Sun, March 19
San Luis v America
Pumas UNAM v Tecos UAG
Santos v Monterrey

Sat, March 25
Toluca v Pumas UNAM
Cruz Azul v Necaxa
Monterrey v Guadalajara
Morelia v Dorados
Veracruz v San Luis
Atlas v Tigres

Sun, March 26
Pachuca v Santos
America v Jaguares
Tecos UAG v Atlante

Sat, April 1
Atlante v Toluca
Guadalajara v Pachuca
Dorados v Atlas
Tigres v Tecos UAG
Veracruz v America
Necaxa v Monterrey

Sun, April 2
San Luis v Cruz Azul
Pumas UNAM v Jaguares
Santos v Morelia

Sat, April 8
Toluca v Tigres
Monterrey v San Luis
Jaguares v Atlante
Cruz Azul v Veracruz
Morelia v Guadalajara
Atlas v Santos

Sun, April 9
Pachuca v Necaxa
America v Pumas UNAM
Tecos UAG v Dorados

Sat, April 15
Cruz Azul v America
Atlante v Pumas UNAM
Dorados v Toluca
Guadalajara v Atlas
Veracruz v Monterrey
Tigres v Jaguares
Necaxa v Morelia

Sun, April 16
San Luis v Pachuca
Santos v Tecos UAG

Sat, April 22
Toluca v Santos
Atlante v America
Jaguares v Dorados
Monterrey v Cruz Azul
Morelia v San Luis
Atlas v Necaxa

Sun, April 23
Pumas UNAM v Tigres
Pachuca v Veracruz
Tecos UAG v Guadalajara

Sat, April 29
Necaxa v Tecos UAG
America v Monterrey
Guadalajara v Toluca
Santos v Jaguares
Veracruz v Morelia
Tigres v Atlante
San Luis v Atlas
Dorados v Pumas UNAM
Cruz Azul v Pachuca

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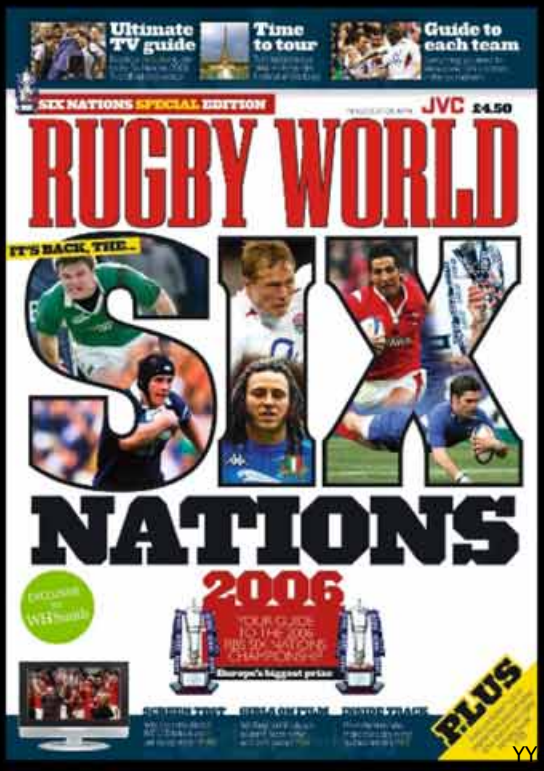

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the Knowledge

everything you need to know about...

National team nicknames

THE AFRICAN NATIONS CUP once again demonstrates how Africa leads the way when it comes to national team nicknames. Almost every African country has a moniker for the national side, and often separate nicknames for women's, Olympic and youth sides.

Animals are the dominant theme, some of the best known names being the Super Eagles of Nigeria,

Flight of fancy…Nigeria's mascot

Indomitable Lions of Cameroon and Atlas Lions of Morocco. Some of the most impressive African nicknames will not feature in the Nations Cup in Egypt. Among those missing will be the Stallions of Burkina Faso, Panthers of Gabon, Crocodiles of Lesotho, Benin's Squirrels and Burundi's Sparrows.

Insects and creepy-crawlies also feature in the lexicon of African nicknames, with Rwanda known as *Amavubi* (wasps) and Madagascar as Scorpions.

A few African countries do not go down the wildlife route. Liberia's Lone Star refers to the star in the national flag, while Ghana Black Stars, Namibia's Brave Warriors and Malawi's Flames speak for themselves. Kenya are known as Harambee Stars after *harambee*, the national motto, which means pulling together. South Africa's *Bafana Bafana* (Swahili for "the boys") is a relatively recent nickname.

A few other African countries go for straight geographical references. Tanzania are known as Kilimanjaro Stars, while Senegal's Lions of Teranga is a reference to the country's own nickname.

African national women's teams have adopted variations on the nicknames of their male counterparts. Hence Cameroon's Indomitable Lionesses and Ghana's Black Queens. Perhaps the best belongs to Egypt. While the men are known as Pharaohs, the women have been dubbed Cleopatras.

Under-17 teams have also adopted nicknames. Cubs feature heavily where the senior sides are lions, such as Morocco's Atlas Cubs and Cameroon's Lion Cubs. Nigeria are known as the Golden Eaglets, while Ghana are the Black Starlets.

Shirt colours are the main theme outside Africa, and especially in Europe. Italy are the *Azzurri* (blues), France are *Les Bleus*, Holland are *Oranje* and Belgium *Les Diables Rouges* (Red Devils).

It's a similar story in South America. Brazil are often referred to as *Canarinha* (little canary, after the shirt colour), Argentina as *Albiceleste* (white and light blues) and Uruguay as *La Celeste* (light blues).

More prosaically, Brazil are also known as the *selecao*, while Spain are *la seleccion*. In Germany, the *Nationalmannschaft* (literally, national team) has become the nickname of choice.

The Caribbean and Central America region has provided some more imaginative names, from Jamaica's Reggae Boyz and the *Ticos* of Costa Rica to Trinidad & Tobago's Soca Warriors, a term adopted a few years ago after being used by a local journalist.

Head lines…a dedicated Jamaica fan

Finally, an honorary mention for Australia, where the Socceroos (senior men), Matildas (women) and Joeys (Under-17s) continue that country's fine tradition of sporting nicknames.

Walking Matildas…Australian players with kangaroo mascot

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MARCH ISSUE
ON SALE FEBRUARY 17

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The **WORLD SOCCER** Essential Guide

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Australia
Brazil
Costa Rica
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PART ONE

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Incentive bonus

The debutants are relishing having the chance to put one over on Portugal, their former colonial masters

THE WORLD CUP draw, which put Angola in the same group as former colonial masters Portugal, gave the squad an even greater incentive to perform well as they prepare for their debut on football's biggest stage.

Angola face the Portuguese in Cologne on June 11, in their first group match, and will be eager to banish the bitter memories of their two previous meetings, both in Lisbon – a 6-0 defeat in 1989 and a 2001 game that was abandoned after the Africans, losing 5-1 at the time, had had four players sent off.

Over the years, Angola has produced many players who went on to play for Portugal – Benfica legend Espirito Santos and Peyroteo of Sporting Lisbon in the late 1930s, and, later, Jose Aguas, Jacinto Joao, Dinis and Jordao.

Angolan football is still intertwined with Portugal's, and many current internationals play in the Portuguese League.

For many years, Angola have made a concerted effort to seek out Europe-based players who are qualified to play for them. Some of the current national team squad were born in Angola but moved to Portugal at an early age, such as midfielders Freddy and Figueiredo.

Current coach Luis Oliveira Goncalves has kept up the tradition, even after the World Cup finals place was secured in October, and the newcomers include midfielder Edson of Pacos Ferreira, who made his debut in the 1-0 friendly defeat away to Japan in November.

Striker and captain Akwa is the team's key player. He has three potential partners – Flavio, Love or Mantorras – but whatever the attack's make-up, it is always lively, thriving on a good supply from left-winger Gilberto.

Yamba Asha of Angolan champions AS Aviacao is a storming left-back. However, he failed a drugs test following the final World Cup qualifier and may be banned for the finals. Finding a replacement is Goncalves' first priority.

Mark Gleeson

Staking a claim… Edson made his debut for Angola against Japan in November

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The Squad

Key Men

MANTORRAS
The Benfica striker was injured for the best part of two years and has made only a few appearances for the national team since returning to action last January following an agreement between the Angolan federation and his club to make his rehabilitation as risk-free as possible. But his potential is undoubted.

AKWA

Captain and the country's all-time leading scorer and most capped international, with 31 goals in 68 games. He hit the late winner against Rwanda that secured the World Cup place. Akwa was with Benfica as a teenager before leaving for a lucrative career in Qatar.

FIGUEIREDO
The 33-year-old has only 16 caps having spent much of his career in the obscurity of the Portuguese lower divisions. He is an influential figure, however, and has even captained Angola on occasion. Has a terrific workrate and is a crafty free-kick taker.

The Coach

LUIS OLIVEIRA GONCALVES

The 48-year-old has gained iconic status by guiding Angola to the World Cup finals for the first time. Goncalves won the African Youth Championship with the country's Under-20s in 2001, the same year he took InterClube, Luanda's police team, to the Final of the African Cup-winners Cup.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
GOLIATH	Sagrada Esperanca	01.10.72	20	0
JOAO RICARDO	Unattached	07.01.70	17	0
LAMA	Petro Atletico	01.01.81	9	0
DEFENDERS				
DELGADO	Primeiro Agosto	01.11.79	10	0
JACINTO	AS Aviacao	10.12.74	18	0
JAMBA	AS Aviacao	10.07.77	27	0
KALI	Santa Clara (Por)	11.10.78	16	0
LEBO-LEBO	Sagrada Esperanca	29.05.77	10	0
LOCO	Benfica Luanda	25.12.84	4	0
MANUEL	AS Aviacao	16.12.82	8	0
MARCO AIROSA	Barreirense (Por)	06.08.84	0	0
RUI MARQUES	Leeds (Eng)	03.09.77	0	0
YAMBA ASHA	AS Aviacao	31.06.76	49	0
MIDFIELDERS				
ANDRE	Kuwait SC (Kuw)	14.05.78	26	0
CHINHO	Sagrada Esperanca	04.02.82	12	1
EDSON	Pacos Ferreira (Por)	03.02.80	1	0
FIGUEIREDO	Varzim (Por)	28.11.72	16	2
FREDDY	Moreirense (Por)	14.08.79	10	1
GILBERTO	Al Ahly (Egy)	21.09.82	31	5
MENDONCA	Varzim (Por)	09.10.82	28	3
MILOY	InterClube	27.05.81	10	0
STOPIRRA	Sagrada Esperanca	25.12.78	28	1
ZE KALANGA	Petro Atletico	12.10.83	15	2
FORWARDS				
AKWA	Al Wakra (Qat)	30.05.77	68	31
Andre "Titi" BUENGO	Clermont Foot (Fra)	11.02.80	0	0
FLAVIO	Al Ahly (Egy)	30.12.79	41	10
LOVE	AS Aviacao	14.03.79	30	4
MANTORRAS	Benfica (Por)	18.03.82	6	2
MAURITO	Al Wahda (UAE)	24.06.81	12	2
SANTANA	Sagrada Esperanca	16.06.83	3	0

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Short on confidence

A run of mediocre performances has exacerbated fears of a repeat of the 2002 World Cup debacle

AFTER EVERY World Cup draw, the feeling in Argentina is that the national team have been put in a difficult group. The 2006 draw was no exception, as Holland, Ivory Coast and Serbia & Montenegro were named as their opponents.

Normally, there is still a feeling that Argentina are a match for anyone on their day, but confidence has taken a hit this time round because of the memories of the team's first-round exit at the last World Cup and some mediocre, goalshy performances in the last three qualifiers for this year's finals. Argentina lost 1-0 away to Paraguay in September, beat lowly Peru 2-0 the following month only with a late penalty and a last-minute own goal, and then lost 1-0 away to Uruguay.

Although Argentina showed improved form against England in a friendly in November, lapses in concentration meant they conceded two late goals to lose 3-2.

Coach Jose Pekerman admits he is not yet satisfied with his team. Even in midfield, the strongest department, he must still decide who makes the best partner for linchpin Juan Roman Riquelme, and Javier Mascherano has a long-term injury.

Pundits have expressed doubts about whether keeper Roberto Abbondanzieri is the best man for the job, and the defence, which has performed poorly in some recent games, lacks good reserves and may have to do without first-choice Gabriel Heinze because of injury.

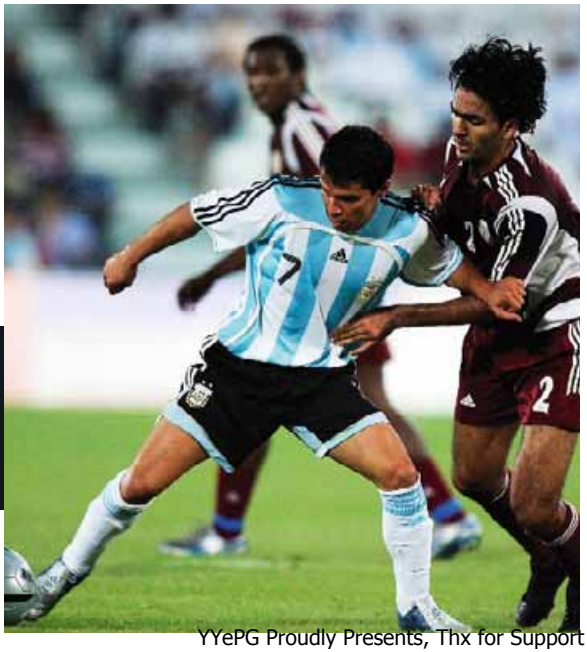
But perhaps the main problem is up front, where Hernan Crespo does not have the kind of support he enjoys at club level with Chelsea. Argentina have two exciting young forwards in Carlos Tevez and Lionel Messi, but Tevez has rarely made the starting line-up to date and Messi has even less experience.

Argentina beat Qatar 3-0 away just after the England defeat, but Pekerman is hoping to secure friendlies against European opposition in the run-up to the World Cup since his side face two such countries at the finals.

As for tactics, the coach is not a slave to the 3-3-1-3 system used by his predecessor, Marcelo Bielsa, but the team often end up playing that way anyway. Defender Juan Pablo Sorin creates danger by joining the forwards during attacks, and the captain shows the sort of enthusiasm and guts that some of the other players seem to lack.

That deficiency and the fear of early elimination raise doubts about the team's mental strength. Unless the team can get their heads together, they will again fail to live up to their billing as one of the finals' leading lights.

Eric Weil



Holding sway… Javier Saviola keeps possession during the 3-0 friendly win in Qatar. Now coach Pekerman is seeking European opposition

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The Squad

Key Men

JUAN PABLO SORIN
The heart and soul of the team, and his spirit and experience make him the ideal choice as captain. A good defender who covers a lot of ground and is dangerous in front of goal.

JUAN ROMAN RIQUELME (below)
Most moves go through him and he organises play well. Lacks pace, but is nevertheless Argentina's main man, and his team-mates rely on him a lot.

CARLOS TEVEZ
Has rarely been a starter in the team, but could make a big impact at the World Cup after his good season with Brazilian champions Corinthians, for whom he was top scorer. The forward has a powerful shot and is difficult to mark since he often drops deep into midfield.

The Coach

JOSE PEKERMAN
The 56-year-old has been national coach since September 2004. Had a successful spell with Argentina's youth teams, leading the Under-20s to three World Youth Cup triumphs. Turned down an offer to coach the senior team in 1998 saying he did not have adequate experience and was made team manager instead, but he took the senior team reins six years later. Was a midfielder with Argentinos Juniors before going into coaching. Led the youth team of top Chilean side Colo Colo before entering the Argentina set-up.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Roberto ABBONDANZIERI	Boca Juniors	19.08.72	18	0
Leo FRANCO	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	20.05.77	3	0
German LUX	River Plate	07.06.82	4	0
DEFENDERS				
Roberto AYALA	Valencia (Spa)	14.04.73	102	6
Nicolas BURDISSO	Internazionale (Ita)	12.04.81	6	0
Fabricio COLOCCINI	Dep La Coruna (Spa)	22.01.82	18	0
Gabriel HEINZE	Manchester Utd (Eng)	19.04.78	24	1
Gabriel MILITO	Zaragoza (Spa)	07.09.80	10	0
Diego PLACENTE	Celta Vigo (Spa)	24.04.77	19	0
Facundo QUIROGA	Wolfsburg (Ger)	10.01.78	15	0
Clemente RODRIGUEZ	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	31.07.81	6	0
Gonzalo RODRIGUEZ	Villarreal (Spa)	10.04.84	5	0
Walter SAMUEL	Internazionale (Ita)	22.03.78	53	4
Juan Pablo SORIN	Villarreal (Spa)	05.05.76	67	9
Javier ZANETTI	Internazionale (Ita)	10.08.73	90	5
MIDFIELDERS				
Pablo AIMAR	Valencia (Spa)	03.11.79	38	5
Sebastian BATTAGLIA	Boca Juniors	08.11.80	6	0
Esteban CAMBIASSO	Internazionale (Ita)	18.08.80	16	1
Martin DEMICHELIS	Bayern Munich (Ger)	20.12.80	2	0
Javier MASCHERANO	Corinthians (Bra)	08.06.84	12	0
Juan Roman RIQUELME	Villarreal (Spa)	24.06.78	27	8
Maximiliano RODRIGUEZ	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	02.01.81	10	1
Mario SANTANA	Palermo (Ita)	23.12.81	6	1
FORWARDS				
Hernan CRESPO	Chelsea (Eng)	05.07.75	55	28
Cesar DELGADO	Cruz Azul (Mex)	18.08.81	19	3
Luciano FIGUEROA	Villarreal (Spa)	19.05.81	12	7
Luciano GALLETTI	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	09.04.80	9	1
Cristian "Kily" GONZALEZ	Internazionale (Ita)	04.08.74	54	9
Lionel MESSI	Barcelona (Spa)	24.06.87	5	0
Javier SAVIOLA	Sevilla (Spa)	11.12.81	27	9
Carlos TEVEZ	Corinthians (Bra)	05.02.84	17	2

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That's the spirit

The Socceroos have won through to the World Cup, 32 years after their only other appearance, following the arrival of coach Guus Hiddink

AUSTRALIANS ARE still recovering from the celebrations that followed the Socceroos' dramatic penalty shoot-out victory over Uruguay in the qualifying play-off in Sydney on November 16.

On what is being called the greatest night in the history of Australian soccer, the winning spot-kick from Alaves striker John Aloisi was watched by 82,000 fans in the Telstra stadium as well as a record 3.4 million television viewers.

Dutchman Guus Hiddink, who replaced Frank Farina as national coach before the Uruguay showdown, has been credited with fostering a team spirit that helped overcome the South Americans over the two games. Victory in Sydney was particularly sweet because Uruguay had beaten Australia in a play-off for the 2002 finals amid accusations of dirty tricks.

So, Australia are returning to the World Cup finals 32 years after their only other appearance, also in Germany, and will be confident of a much stronger performance. In 1974, they were beaten by both West and East Germany, and collected their only point in a 0-0 draw with Chile.

This time around, Australia have a fighting chance of finishing second in their group behind overwhelming favourites Brazil. Croatia and Japan are both beatable, with the Croatia game in particular likely to stir passions since Melbourne has a large Croat community.

In many ways, Australia will be a 15th European side in Germany. Melbourne Victory striker Archie Thompson could be the only player from the domestic League in the finals squad, while the England-based contingent should be particularly strong. Hiddink has continued the "Euro-fication" of the Socceroos that began under Farina, with friendly games played in the continent to avoid the problems caused by hauling the squad all the way back to Australia.

The Dutchman has plenty of options for the attacking element of his 3-5-2 formation, with goalscoring midfielders like Tim Cahill, Harry Kewell and Marco Bresciano joining established strikers Mark Viduka and Aloisi. Options are more limited at the back, and Blackburn's Lucas Neill will have an important role in a three-man central defence that is rarely tested at the highest level.

Hiddink's greatest strength is his ability to galvanise a squad of players for a major tournament, as he demonstrated with South Korea four years ago. Then, however, he worked with the players for a full six months before the finals. Will four weeks with Australia be enough time for a squad that traditionally has suffered from a lack of preparation?

Take-off…John Aloisi, pursued by jubilant team-mates, celebrates scoring Australia's winning penalty against Uruguay

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The Squad

Key Men

MARCO BRESCIANO
Italy-based midfielder who is not as high-profile as Mark Viduka or Harry Kewell but is nevertheless the Socceroos' main schemer. He also has a knack of scoring important goals, including the one against Uruguay in the play-off second leg in Sydney that took the tie to penalties.

MARK VIDUKA
Striker and captain who became a key figure under previous coach Frank Farina after declining to play for Croatia, his parents' homeland and where he played for Croatia (Dinamo) Zagreb.

HARRY KEWELL
The left-sided attacking midfielder silenced many of his critics with a forceful performance against Uruguay in Sydney. Starting to recapture his Leeds form at Liverpool after a spate of injuries and poor performances.

The Coach

GUUS HIDDINK
The charismatic Dutchman is a national hero in South Korea after guiding the national side to the World Cup semi-finals four years ago. He would have a similar status in Australia if the team make it through the group stage. He combines his Socceroos post with coaching Dutch champions PSV Eindhoven. His lengthy career has also included spells coaching the Dutch national side and Real Madrid.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Ante COVIC	Hammarby (Swe)	31.08.75	0	0
Zeljko KALAC	Milan (Ita)	16.12.72	50	0
Mark SCHWARZER	Middlesbrough (Eng)	06.10.72	36	0
DEFENDERS				
Stephen LAYBUTT	Gent (Blg)	03.09.77	15	1
Stan LAZARIDIS	Birmingham (Eng)	16.08.72	57	0
Jon McKAIN	Poli Timisoara (Rom)	21.09.82	10	0
Ljubo MILICEVIC	Thun (Swi)	13.02.81	5	0
Craig MOORE	Newcastle (Eng)	12.12.75	30	2
Lucas NEILL	Blackburn (Eng)	09.03.78	22	0
Tony POPOVIC	Crystal Palace (Eng)	04.07.73	54	7
Michael THWAITE	National (Rom)	02.05.83	1	0
Tony VIDMAR	NAC Breda (Hol)	04.07.70	75	3
MIDFIELDERS				
Marco BRESCIANO	Parma (Ita)	11.02.80	22	7
Alex BROSQUE	Queensland Roar	12.10.83	3	0
Tim CAHILL	Everton (Eng)	06.12.79	14	8
Scott CHIPPERFIELD	Basle (Swi)	30.12.75	44	11
Jason CULINA	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	05.08.80	11	0
Ahmad ELRICH	Fulham (Eng)	30.05.81	15	4
Brett EMERTON	Blackburn (Eng)	22.02.79	45	11
Vince GRELLA	Parma (Ita)	05.10.79	15	0
Harry KEWELL	Liverpool (Eng)	22.09.78	19	6
Josip SKOKO	Wigan (Eng)	10.12.75	43	7
Mile STERJOVSKI	Basle (Swi)	27.05.79	19	3
Luke WILKSHIRE	Bristol City (Eng)	02.10.81	6	0
FORWARDS				
Paul AGOSTINO	1860 Munich (Ger)	09.06.75	18	7
John ALOISI	Alaves (Spa)	05.02.76	39	22
Joel GRIFFITHS	Neuchatel Xamax (Swi)	21.08.79	1	0
Ante MILICIC	Newcastle Utd (Aus)	04.04.74	6	5
Archie THOMPSON	Melbourne Victory	23.10.78	16	20
Mark VIDUKA	Middlesbrough (Eng)	09.10.75	31	6

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Leading from the front

Coach Parreira believes his side's status as tournament favourites offers the players an invigorating challenge to prove the pundits right

NOT SINCE 1982 have Brazil gone into the World Cup so confident of winning. They are reigning world champions, Copa America champions and Confederations Cup champions, while Ronaldinho has walked off with every Player of the Year trophy known to man. There's one small snag: Brazil failed to win the World Cup in 1982.

However, coach Carlos Alberto Parreira is not letting that put him off. Rather than shy away from the role of favourites and all the pitfalls it brings, Parreira sees it as a new challenge. "In 1970, 1994 and 2002, we started the tournament discredited and with people questioning us," he said. "Now, it is time for us to start as favourites and win the title as favourites."

Brazil are likely to start with the same system they used in the last few World Cup qualifiers and the Confederations Cup last summer – a four-man defence, two holding midfielders, Adriano and Ronaldo in attack, with Ronaldinho and Kaka behind them. However, if Parreira feels the defence is too exposed, then one of the so-called Magic Quartet may have to make way for a third midfielder. Meanwhile, Robinho, on current form, is expected to start on the bench.

If Brazil's top players all hit form at the same time, then the world champions will be fairly close to unstoppable. But there are weaknesses. Ronaldinho has in the past had trouble reaching the same high levels for Brazil as he achieves for Barcelona. Full-backs Cafu and Roberto Carlos will have a combined age of 69, and the latter, while still packing a fearsome free-kick, has long ceased to take his defensive duties seriously. Goalkeeper Dida and his reserve Julio Cesar are both prone to lapses, and the defence has difficulty coping with high balls in the area.

While most agree Parreira's line-up is basically the right one, many feel that Rogerio Ceni, Sao Paulo's free-kick-taking goalkeeper, deserves to be in the squad and that Juninho Pernambucano is too good to start on the bench.

Parreira was reasonably happy with the finals draw, though wary of the physical threat posed by Croatia, Japan and, especially, Australia. "In technical terms, it looks straightforward, but they're all teams with physical strength, tactical discipline and speed," he said. "We're going to have to be on our toes to avoid getting caught out."

Brian Homewood

Two plus two… Adriano and Kaka are half of Brazil's attacking Magic Quartet, but one of the four may have to drop to the bench if coach Parreira thinks the defence is too exposed

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The Squad

Key Men

RONALDINHO
Burst on to the international scene at the 1999 Copa America, when he scored a goal against Venezuela reminiscent of Pele's 1958 World Cup Final effort. Played second fiddle to Rivaldo and Ronaldo at the 2002 World Cup but, if he lives up to his club form, he should hog the limelight this time.

RONALDO

Heading for his fourth World Cup. After watching from the bench as a 17-year-old in 1994, he appeared weighed down by expectation in 1998, but bounced back from a long injury lay-off to finish top scorer at 2002. Currently overshadowed by Ronaldinho but should not be written off.

EMERSON
Was due to captain the side in Korea/Japan but dislocated a shoulder just before the finals. In Germany, Emerson's role guarding the back four is going to be crucial with so many attack-minded players in the side.

The Coach

CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA
Led Brazil to victory at USA 94. Began his coaching career in Ghana in 1968 and has also coached Kuwait (1982), the United Arab Emirates (1990) and Saudi Arabia (1998) at World Cup finals. The amiable boss likes to keep things simple, rarely changing his line-up or formation.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
DIDA	Milan (Ita)	07.10.73	85	0
Heurelho GOMES	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	15.02.81	0	0
JULIO CESAR	Internazionale (Ita)	03.09.79	11	0
DEFENDERS				
ALEX RODRIGO	PSV Eindhoven (Hol)	17.06.82	0	0
CAFU	Milan (Ita)	07.06.70	144	5
CICINHO	Real Madrid (Spa)	24.06.80	9	1
GILBERTO	Hertha Berlin (Ger)	25.04.76	8	0
GUSTAVO NERY	Corinthians	22.07.77	9	0
JUAN	Leverkusen (Ger)	01.02.79	37	2
LUCIO	Bayern Munich (Ger)	08.05.78	48	2
LUISAO	Benfica (Por)	13.02.81	16	1
MAICON	Monaco (Fra)	26.07.81	8	0
ROBERTO CARLOS	Real Madrid (Spa)	10.04.73	125	10
ROQUE JUNIOR	Leverkusen (Ger)	31.09.76	50	2
MIDFIELDERS				
ALEX	Fenerbahce (Tur)	14.09.77	49	12
EDMILSON	Barcelona (Spa)	10.07.76	29	1
EMERSON Ferreira	Juventus (Ita)	04.04.76	70	6
GILBERTO SILVA	Arsenal (Eng)	07.10.76	37	3
JULIO BAPTISTA	Real Madrid (Spa)	01.10.81	17	3
JUNINHO Pernambucano	Lyon (Fra)	30.01.75	37	4
KAKA	Milan (Ita)	22.04.82	32	9
RENATO	Sevilla (Spa)	15.05.79	29	0
RICARDINHO	Santos	23.05.76	17	1
ZE ROBERTO	Bayern Munich (Ger)	06.07.74	77	5
FORWARDS				
ADRIANO	Internazionale (Ita)	17.02.82	32	22
FRED	Lyon (Fra)	03.10.83	1	2
RICARDO OLIVEIRA	Betis (Spa)	06.05.80	11	4
ROBINHO	Real Madrid (Spa)	25.01.84	17	5
RONALDINHO	Barcelona (Spa)	21.03.80	65	30
RONALDO	Real Madrid (Spa)	22.09.76	96	60

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Ticos take heart

A favourable draw has given Wanchope and co a fighting chance of making the last 16

COSTA RICANS are optimistic by nature, and the World Cup draw did not cloud their sunny outlook. The Ticos could have got a far tougher trio of opponents than Germany, Poland and Ecuador, and they are particularly enthusiastic about playing in the tournament's opening match, against the hosts. Coach Alexandre Guimaraes called it an honour, while captain Luis Marin referred to the opportunity for causing an upset as "priceless".

Costa Rica's opponents may have more established footballing traditions, but the Ticos will not let that stop them contemplating reaching the second round. "I'm sure we can do it. It won't be easy but it won't be impossible either," said Guimaraes, who achieved the feat as a player – at Italia 90 – and came close to repeating it at the 2002 World Cup during his first spell in charge of the Ticos.

Costa Rica finished third in their group in Korea/Japan, but finished behind runners-up Turkey only on goal difference. The experience gained from that campaign could make all the difference this time round in pushing the Ticos on a stage.

There are few positives to be taken from the results of Costa Rica's previous meetings with their group opponents. They have never met Germany, lost both their games against Poland, and won just one of their eight meetings with Ecuador. On top of that, the coach's tactics and team selection have come in for some criticism since he retook the reins in the midst of the qualifiers for 2006. Yet Guimaraes' motivational skills are not in doubt and he will certainly have his team prepared mentally.

Costa Rica pride themselves on playing with a great deal of flair and skill, and their biggest challenge may be to continue to play in this way without leaving themselves vulnerable in defence.

Defending set-pieces and crosses has also proved a weakness in the past, with the back line lacking aerial strength and having a tendency not to mark closely enough.

Since retaking charge, Guimaraes has stuck with the 4-4-2 formation used by his predecessor, Colombian Jorge Luis Pinto. However, Guimaraes favoured 3-5-2 in his previous spell at the helm, and now that he has time to tinker, he could yet revert to that formation.

Many will see Costa Rica as the weakest members of Group A, but they will at the very least offer entertaining soccer, and if any of their rivals underestimate them, they have the ability to make them pay the price.

Greg Reeser

Pushing on… defender Leonardo Gonzalez holds off the USA's Steve Ralston during the qualifying campaign

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The Squad

Key Men

PAULO WANCHOPE
Costa Rica's best-known player following his stints in England (with Derby, West Ham and Manchester City), Spain (Malaga) and Qatar (Al Gharafa), and also the national team's all-time leading scorer with 43 goals. Knee injuries have plagued him throughout his career, one almost causing him to miss the 2002 World Cup.

GILBERTO MARTINEZ

Capable of playing anywhere in defence, but is most at home at centre-back. Has been a first-choice ever since making his debut, in the qualifiers for the 2002 World Cup. Plays his club football in Italy with Brescia, now in Serie B.

WALTER CENTENO
Costa Rica's No 10, pulling the strings in midfield. Centeno has spent most of his club career with Saprissa in his homeland, but had one season at AEK Athens, during which he scored against Real Madrid at the Bernabeu in a Champions League tie.

The Coach

ALEXANDRE GUIMARAES

In his second stint at the helm, having also led the Ticos to the 2002 World Cup, where they finished third in their group. Won 11 caps as a player, which included appearances at the 1990 World Cup, when Costa Rica reached the second round. Born in Brazil but moved to Costa Rica aged 11.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Wardy ALFARO	Alajuelense	31.12.77		
Alvaro MESEN	Herediano	24.12.72		
Jose Francisco PORRAS	Saprissa	08.11.70		
DEFENDERS				
Gabriel BADILLA	Saprissa	30.06.84		
Try BENNETH	Saprissa	05.08.75		
Carlos CASTRO	Alajuelense	10.09.78		
Jervis DRUMMOND	Saprissa	08.09.76		
Leonardo GONZALEZ	Herediano	21.11.80		
Luis MARIN	Alajuelense	10.08.74		
Gilberto MARTINEZ	Brescia (Ita)	01.10.79		
Roy MYRIE	Alajuelense	21.08.82		
Douglas SEQUEIRA	Chivas (USA)	23.08.77		
Michael UMANA	LA Galaxy (USA)	16.07.82		
Harold WALLACE	Alajuelense	07.09.75		
Mauricio WRIGHT	Herediano	20.12.70		
MIDFIELDERS				
Cristian BOLANOS	Saprissa	17.05.84		
Walter CENTENO	Saprissa	06.10.74		
Danny FONSECA	Cartagines	07.09.79		
Carlos HERNANDEZ	Alajuelense	09.04.82		
Jose Luis LOPEZ	Saprissa	31.03.81		
Wilmer LOPEZ	Alajuelense	08.03.71		
Alonso SOLIS	Saprissa	14.10.78		
Mauricio SOLIS	Comunicaciones (Gtm)	13.12.72		
Jafet SOTO	Herediano	01.04.76		
FORWARDS				
Minor DIAZ	Alajuelense	26.12.80		
Ronald GOMEZ	Saprissa	24.01.75		
Froylan LEDEZMA	Alajuelense	02.01.78		
Bryan RUIZ	Alajuelense	18.08.85		
Alvaro SABORIO	Saprissa	25.03.82		
Paulo WANCHOPE	Al Gharafa (Qat)	31.07.76		

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Test of strength

The team showed their resilience by qualifying for the finals unbeaten, but there is little back-up for the well-established starting XI

QUALIFICATION FOR Germany 2006 is a source of pride for Croatians since it is the fifth time out of the last six attempts that the team have reached the finals of a major tournament. That is no mean feat for a country of fewer than five million people.

Much of the credit for reaching this year's World Cup goes to coach Zlatko Kranjcar, who has instilled a fighting spirit among the players since taking charge in summer 2004. That enabled them to see off the challenge of Sweden for top spot in Group 8 and remain unbeaten.

But Croatia are much more than a side that merely grind out results. Kranjcar uses a 3-4-1-2 formation, which is distinctly attack-minded given that two of the midfielders are wingers – Darijo Srna and Marko Babic.

The coach's biggest problem is a lack of cover for the well-established first XI – Tomislav Butina in goal; a defence of Stjepan Tomas, Robert Kovac and Josip Simunic; Srna, Igor Tudor, Niko Kovac and Babic across the middle; Niko Kranjcar, the coach's son, in the hole; and Ivica Olic partnering Dado Prso up front.

Bosko Balaban, among the goals for Club Brugge this term, and Dario Simic, recently back in the first-team frame at Milan, are two of the few players likely to make a challenge for a place in the starting line-up. Meanwhile, the national team's concerted effort to inject new blood into the squad by contacting foreign players with Croatian roots looks unlikely to be profitable in time for the finals. Boca Juniors' Danijel Bilos, a potential replacement for the injury-troubled Prso, has already nailed his colours to Argentina's mast; and two other targets – Ivan Rakitic of Basle and Hamburg's Mustafa Kucukovic – are teenagers and lack experience.

The search for recruits in foreign leagues highlights the weakness of the domestic championship. Ironically, one of the few reserves with the potential to make an impact at the finals is Eduardo Da Silva, a Brazil-born forward with Dinamo Zagreb who is a naturalised Croatian.

Despite worries over his squad strength, Kranjcar senior expressed his confidence that his side would not only get through their group – they face Brazil, Japan and Australia – but also give potential second round opponents Italy a run for their money.

Croatia will certainly have some "home" advantage at the finals. Simunic, Niko Kovac, Babic and reserves Jurica Vranjes and Ivan Klasnic are all with German clubs, and so are familiar with the stadiums and the country. In addition, many Croatians work in Germany, meaning the team should not be short of support.

Zdravko Reic

Never say die… Stjepan Tomas goes to ground against Sweden, but Croatia saw off the Scandinavians' challenge to top qualifying Group 8

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The Squad

Key Men

IGOR TUDOR
A player with a huge amount of authority, having been a first-teamer since France 98. Tudor was a central defender in those days but has been used as a holding midfielder since Kranjcar took over as coach, allowing his distribution and vision to be even more effective. The 27-year-old is excellent in the air, making him dangerous at set-pieces.

DARIJO SRNA

Pacy right winger and the real engine of the team. Aggressive and confident when fulfilling his defensive duties, but also a key player when it comes to attack. His passing and free-kick-taking are Beckham-esque, and he weighed in with five goals during the qualifiers.

DADO PRSO
The team's main striker, excellent in the air, at keeping possession and playing in team-mates. But there are concerns about his recurring knee injuries. Made his Croatia debut aged 27 on the orders of federation president Vlatko Markovic.

The Coach

ZLATKO KRANJCAR

The former Dinamo Zagreb and Rapid Wien striker still has a preference for attacking play as a coach. Led Dinamo Zagreb to two domestic Doubles and won another League title with FC Zagreb before replacing safety-first Otto Baric as national boss in August 2004.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Tomislav BUTINA	Club Brugge (Blg)	30.03.74	26	0
Joey DIDULICA	Austria Wien (Aut)	14.10.77	1	0
Stipe PLETIKOSA	Hajduk Split	08.01.79	46	0
Vedran RUNJE	Standard Liege (Blg)	10.02.76	0	0
DEFENDERS				
Ivan BOSNJAK	Dinamo Zagreb	06.02.79	8	0
Robert KOVAC	Juventus (Ita)	06.04.74	51	0
Ivica KRIZANAC	Zenit (Rus)	13.04.79	0	0
Danijel PRANJIC	Heerenveen (Hol)	02.12.81	2	0
Goran SABLIC	Kyiv Dynamo (Ukr)	04.08.79	3	0
Anthony SERIC	Panathinaikos (Gre)	15.01.79	14	0
Dario SIMIC	Milan (Ita)	12.11.75	75	2
Josip SIMUNIC	Hertha Berlin (Ger)	18.02.78	39	3
Mario TOKIC	Austria Wien (Aut)	23.07.75	20	0
Stjepan TOMAS	Galatasaray (Tur)	06.03.76	44	1
MIDFIELDERS				
Marko BABIC	Leverkusen (Ger)	28.01.81	27	1
Mario BAZINA	Grazer AK (Aut)	08.09.75	1	0
Niko KOVAC	Hertha Berlin (Ger)	15.10.71	53	9
Niko KRANJCAR	Hajduk Split	13.08.84	13	3
Ivan LEKO	Club Brugge (Blg)	07.02.78	9	0
Jerko LEKO	Kyiv Dynamo (Ukr)	09.04.80	28	1
Darijo SRNA	Shakhtar (Ukr)	01.05.82	31	8
Igor TUDOR	Siena (Ita)	16.04.78	48	3
Jurica VRANJES	Werder Bremen (Ger)	31.01.80	21	0
Davor VUGRINEC	Rijeka	24.03.75	26	7
FORWARDS				
Bosko BALABAN	Club Brugge (Blg)	15.10.78	23	8
Sasha BJELANOVIC	Ascoli (Ita)	06.11.79	1	0
Eduardo DA SILVA	Dinamo Zagreb	25.02.83	3	0
Ivan KLASNIC	Werder Bremen (Ger)	29.01.80	15	4
Ivica OLIC	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	14.09.79	32	6
Dado PRSO	Rangers (Sco)	05.11.74	24	8

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Better late than never

Nedved, Poborsky and co have finally made it to football's biggest stage and, at their age, will have to make the most of it

THE LAST TIME Czech players appeared at a World Cup finals, as part of a Czechoslovakia team, was 16 years ago. That means that a supremely talented generation of footballers has come perilously close to missing out on playing on the game's biggest stage, and this will almost certainly be their first and final shot. Pavel Nedved, Karel Poborsky and Tomas Galasek are all 33, while Vladimir Smicer and leading all-time scorer Jan Koller are 32.

The quality of these players is undoubted, but coach Karel Bruckner is taking a cautious approach. "First, we need to advance from our group, which won't be easy," he said following the draw, which pitted the Czechs against Italy, the United States and Ghana in Group E. Yet, the 66-year-old is not intimidated by the opposition. "They're in the same position as us," he said. "We need to play our game, and only that can lead to success."

The Czechs showed their capabilities when reaching the Euro 2004 semi-finals, and their first-choice midfield of Nedved, Poborsky, Galasek and junior partner Tomas Rosicky is still formidable.

Nedved remains the driving force, despite retiring from international football after Euro 2004 and the media hoop-la that surrounded his return just before the World Cup qualifying play-off against Norway. The Juventus star was badly missed in the crunch qualifying group games, and his talent, toil and talismanic properties lifted his team-mates against Norway. His presence in Germany will have an equally positive effect.

The unsettled defence remains a worry, peerless keeper Petr Cech aside. "The more the players play together, the better prepared they are for varied playing styles, which is our strong point," Bruckner says. "But injuries and the introduction of new players into the system could ruin our plans."

Up front, Koller's fitness is the big concern. After tearing a cruciate ligament in September, the giant striker faces up to six months out of action. Bruckner, however, remains committed to the Dortmund forward. "Koller is a key member of our team and our system was quite dependent on him," he admits. "He's not only a formidable attacking force but also valuable in other areas, even in defence. I believe he'll recover from his knee injury in time. Whether he's in form or not, I need Koller in the line-up."

Sam Beckwith

At last…Pavel Nedved celebrates the victory over Norway that booked him his first World Cup finals ticket

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The Squad

Key Men

PAVEL NEDVED
The team's most important player, bringing a mental toughness to the squad it otherwise lacks. He was sorely missed during his 14-month international retirement following Euro 2004, and his galvanising effect was immediately apparent on his comeback. However, the 33-year-old is injury-prone.

PETR CECH

Arguably the world's best goalkeeper. The 23-year-old has a vital role to play in Germany since the Czechs' back four is sometimes wobbly; past form suggests the Chelsea man will rise to the occasion.

MILAN BAROS
Much may depend on the Aston Villa striker rediscovering the scoring touch he showed at Euro 2004, especially with regular strike partner Jan Koller still recovering from knee surgery.

The Coach

KAREL BRUCKNER

The 66-year-old intends to retire after the finals having guided the Czechs to their first World Cup since the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Bruckner is still a hugely respected figure despite the Czechs' difficult qualifying campaign and the Nedved retirement saga. He also has a keen understanding of the modern game despite having no experience of coaching abroad.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Jaromir BLAZEK	Sparta Prague	29.12.72	10	0
Petr CECH	Chelsea (Eng)	20.05.82	38	0
Antonin KINSKY	Saturn (Rus)	31.05.75	5	0
DEFENDERS				
Rene BOLF	Auxerre (Fra)	25.02.74	34	0
Zdenek GRYGERA	Ajax (Hol)	14.05.80	38	1
Tomas HUBSCHMAN	Shakhtar (Ukr)	04.09.81	20	0
Marek JANKULOVSKI	Milan (Ita)	09.05.77	44	7
Martin JIRANEK	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	25.05.79	20	0
Radoslav KOVAC	Spartak Moscow (Rus)	27.11.79	5	0
Pavel MARES	Zenit (Rus)	18.01.76	8	0
David ROZEHNAL	PSG (Fra)	05.07.80	18	0
Tomas UJFALUSI	Fiorentina (Ita)	24.03.78	45	2
MIDFIELDERS				
Tomas GALASEK	Ajax (Hol)	15.01.73	49	1
David JAROLIM	Hamburg (Ger)	17.05.79	1	0
Jiri JAROSIK	Birmingham (Eng)	27.10.77	23	0
Pavel NEDVED	Juventus (Ita)	30.08.72	85	17
Jaroslav PLASIL	Monaco (Fra)	05.01.82	10	1
Karel POBORSKY	Ceske Budejovice	30.03.72	111	7
Jan POLAK	Nurnberg (Ger)	14.03.81	14	5
Tomas ROSICKY	Dortmund (Ger)	04.10.80	52	15
Tomas SIVOK	Sparta Prague	15.09.83	2	0
Rudolf SKACEL	Hearts (Sco)	17.07.79	3	1
Vladimir SMICER	Bordeaux (Fra)	24.05.73	81	27
Roman TYCE	1860 Munich (Ger)	07.05.77	25	1
FORWARDS				
Milan BAROS	Aston Villa (Eng)	28.10.81	45	26
Marek HEINZ	Galatasaray (Tur)	04.08.77	25	5
Tomas JUN	Trabzonspor (Tur)	17.01.83	9	2
Jan KOLLER	Dortmund (Ger)	30.03.73	66	40
Vratislav LOKVENC	Salzburg (Aut)	27.09.73	69	13
Jiri STAJNER	Hannover (Ger)	27.05.76	17	2

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Work in progress

The South Americans have the ability to reach the last 16, but must be at their best to do so

FOUR YEARS AGO, as Ecuador prepared for their first World Cup, the refrain of coach Hernan Dario Gomez was "we're going to learn". His replacement, Luis Fernando Suarez, is not so humble. "We have the chance to show the progress we've made," he says. "We have the raw material – well-motivated players with technical and tactical qualities – and we're in a group that gives us the possibility of getting through to the second round. Logic makes Germany clear favourites, but we have a chance of finishing in front of the others [Poland and Costa Rica]."

But Suarez highlighted two of his side's weak points when outlining the priorities in arranging warm-up friendlies. Ideal opponents, he said, would be "dangerous in the air, and play a type of football against which Ecuador don't have much experience".

Ecuador's keepers are not sure how to deal with crosses, and of the defenders, only centre-half Giovanny Espinoza has good aerial ability. Meanwhile, the squad has a glaring lack of European experience. Few of the players have played for European clubs; fewer still have settled.

Ecuador recently lost 3-0 to Poland in a friendly in Spain. The pitch was waterlogged and their side weakened, so the result is best disregarded. It is worth noting, though, that it was only their third full international played in Europe.

But it would be unwise to write off Ecuador. Making it to the last World Cup has done wonders for their self-belief, even though they finished bottom of their group. A core of players from 2002 remains, and some interesting additions have been made to the squad. Nearly all their points in qualification came from home games, played at altitude in Quito. But they emerged from even the most difficult away games with credit, leaving the impression of a mature side with the potential to improve.

Ecuador's biggest strength is a well-defined tactical approach and they have moved right away from their traditional slow build-up. "Nowadays, any side can complicate matters by packing the midfield with battlers," says Suarez. "A good team is one that attacks and defends well down the flanks." This is just what his side seek to do. They close down the centre and look to strike quickly through their full-backs and wide midfielders. And they have some dangerous options on the bench to unleash against tiring opponents.

Yet Suarez knows Ecuador can only hurt their opponents if the key players are in top form and peak condition; this is likely to give him some sleepless nights.

Tim Vickery

On high…forward Carlos Tenorio (left) vies with Argentina's Walter Samuel during Ecuador's 2-0 qualifying victory at altitude in Quito

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The Squad

Key Men

IVAN HURTADO
Very experienced centre-back – he has played in 57 World Cup qualifiers, a South American record. Hurtado, also the captain, is the defensive organiser and spreads calm through the team with his sound positioning, superbly timed tackles and reliable distribution. Now based in Qatar with the Al Arabi club after a brief spell in Spain and a longer one in Mexico.

EDISON MENDEZ

Highly talented midfielder whose versatility means that he can be used virtually anywhere. Usually to be found in an attacking role, switching between the flanks. Best known for his rocket shot. Scored the goal that beat Croatia in the last World Cup.

AGUSTIN DELGADO
Ecuador's all-time top scorer and still an excellent finisher, especially in the air. However, he now struggles for fitness, a situation that is unlikely to improve having fallen out with his club, Barcelona of Guayaquil.

The Coach

LUIS FERNANDO SUAREZ

Charismatic, ambitious boss who took over after the fiasco of the 2004 Copa America and immediately dropped many of the old guard. A Colombian, like predecessor Hernan Dario Gomez, and won the Libertadores Cup as a player with Medellin side Atletico Nacional in 1989.

	Club	DOB	Caps	Goals
GOALKEEPERS				
Damian LANZA	Deportivo Cuenca	10.04.82	5	0
Cristian MORA	LDU Quito	20.08.82	4	0
Edwin VILLAFUERTE	Barcelona	12.03.79	12	0
DEFENDERS				
Paul AMBROSSI	LDU Quito	14.10.80	21	0
Renan CALLE	Aucas	09.08.76	4	1
Jairo CAMPOS	LDU Quito	19.07.84	2	0
Jose CORTEZ	Aucas	21.11.79	3	0
Erick DE JESUS	El Nacional	08.11.82	6	0
Ulises DE LA CRUZ	Aston Villa (Eng)	08.08.74	82	5
Giovanny ESPINOZA	LDU Quito	12.04.77	52	2
Fricson GEORGE	Barcelona	18.09.74	14	0
Jorge GUAGUA	El Nacional	28.09.81	12	1
Ivan HURTADO	Al Arabi (Qat)	16.08.74	127	5
Neicer REASCO	LDU Quito	23.07.77	27	0
MIDFIELDERS				
Marlon AYOVI	Deportivo Quito	27.09.71	70	5
Walter AYOVI	Barcelona	11.08.79	17	0
Luis CAICEDO	Olmedo	02.05.79	8	0
Segundo CASTILLO	El Nacional	15.05.82	5	0
Cristian LARA	El Nacional	27.04.80	14	3
Edison MENDEZ	LDU Quito	16.03.79	60	10
Luis SARITAMA	Deportivo Quito	20.10.83	10	0
Edwin TENORIO	Barcelona	16.06.76	66	0
Luis Antonio VALENCIA	Villarreal (Spa)	05.08.85	14	3
FORWARDS				
Jhonny BALDEON	Barcelona	15.06.81	10	3
Felix BORJA	El Nacional	02.04.83	4	1
Agustin DELGADO	Barcelona	23.12.74	67	29
Ivan KAVIEDES	Argentinos Jnrs (Arg)	24.10.77	40	12
Roberto MINA	FC Dallas (USA)	07.11.84	9	0
Franklin SALAS	LDU Quito	30.08.81	23	2
Carlos TENORIO	Al Sadd (Qat)	14.05.79	27	4

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QUALIFYING RESULTS

PLAY-OFFS

Asia-CONCACAF

12.11.05 Trinidad & Tobago-Bahrain..... 1-1
16.11.05 Bahrain-Trinidad & Tobago..... 0-1
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO *2-1 on agg*

Oceania-South America

12.11.05 Uruguay-Australia..... 1-0
16.11.05 Australia-Uruguay.....(aet) 1-0
Agg 1-1. **AUSTRALIA** *4-2 on pens*

Europe

12.11.05 Norway-Czech Republic..... 0-1
16.11.05 Czech Republic-Norway..... 1-0
CZECH REPUBLIC *2-0 on agg*

12.11.05 Spain-Slovakia..... 5-1
16.11.05 Slovakia-Spain..... 1-1
SPAIN *6-2 on agg*

12.11.05 Switzerland-Turkey..... 2-0
16.11.05 Turkey-Switzerland..... 4-2
Agg 4-4. **SWITZERLAND** *on away gls*

Play-off winners qualified for finals

AFRICA

5 finals berths

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TOGO	10	7	2	1	20	8	23
Senegal	10	6	3	1	21	8	21
Zambia	10	6	1	3	16	10	19
Congo	10	3	1	6	10	14	10
Mali	10	2	2	6	11	14	8
Liberia	10	1	1	8	3	27	4

05.06.04 Senegal-Congo 2-0
05.06.04 Zambia-Togo..... 1-0
06.06.04 Liberia-Mali..... 1-0
19.06.04 Mali-Zambia..... 1-1
20.06.04 Congo-Liberia 3-0
20.06.04 Togo-Senegal..... 3-1
03.07.04 Senegal-Zambia..... 1-0
04.07.04 Congo-Mali 1-0
04.07.04 Liberia-Togo..... 0-0
04.09.04 Zambia-Liberia..... 1-0
05.09.04 Mali-Senegal..... 2-2
05.09.04 Togo-Congo..... 2-0
10.10.04 Congo-Zambia 2-3
10.10.04 Liberia-Senegal 0-3
10.10.04 Togo-Mali..... 1-0
26.03.05 Senegal-Liberia 6-1
26.03.05 Zambia-Congo 2-0
27.03.05 Mali-Togo..... 1-2
05.06.05 Congo-Senegal 0-0
05.06.05 Mali-Liberia..... 4-1
05.06.05 Togo-Zambia..... 4-1
18.06.05 Senegal-Togo..... 2-2
18.06.05 Zambia-Mali..... 2-1
19.06.05 Liberia-Congo 0-2
03.09.05 Mali-Congo 2-0
03.09.05 Zambia-Senegal..... 0-1
04.09.05 Togo-Liberia..... 3-0
01.10.05 Liberia-Zambia..... 0-5
08.10.05 Congo-Togo..... 2-3
08.10.05 Senegal-Mali..... 3-0

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
GHANA	10	6	3	1	17	4	21
DR Congo	10	4	4	2	14	10	16
South Africa	10	5	1	4	12	14	16
Burkina Faso	10	4	1	5	14	13	13
Cape Verde Is	10	3	1	6	8	15	10
Uganda	10	2	2	6	6	15	8

05.06.04 Burkina Faso-Ghana 1-0
05.06.04 South Africa-Cape Verde Is 2-1
05.06.04 Uganda-DR Congo..... 1-0
19.06.04 Cape Verde Is-Uganda 1-0
20.06.04 DR Congo-Burkina Faso..... 3-2
20.06.04 Ghana-South Africa..... 3-0
03.07.04 Cape Verde Is-DR Congo 1-1
03.07.04 South Africa-Burkina Faso..... 2-0
03.07.04 Uganda-Ghana 1-1
04.09.04 Burkina Faso-Uganda 2-0
05.09.04 DR Congo-South Africa 1-0
05.09.04 Ghana-Cape Verde Is 2-0
09.10.04 Cape Verde Is-Burkina Faso..... 1-0
10.10.04 Ghana-DR Congo..... 0-0
10.10.04 Uganda-South Africa..... 0-1
26.03.05 Burkina Faso-Cape Verde Is..... 1-2
26.03.05 South Africa-Uganda..... 2-1
27.03.05 DR Congo-Ghana..... 1-1
04.06.05 Cape Verde Is-South Africa 1-2
05.06.05 DR Congo-Uganda..... 4-0
05.06.05 Ghana-Burkina Faso 2-1
18.06.05 Burkina Faso-DR Congo..... 2-0
18.06.05 South Africa-Ghana..... 0-2
18.06.05 Uganda-Cape Verde Is 1-0
03.09.05 Burkina Faso-South Africa..... 3-1
04.09.05 DR Congo-Cape Verde Is 2-1
04.09.05 Ghana-Uganda..... 2-0
08.10.05 Cape Verde Is-Ghana 0-4
08.10.05 South Africa-DR Congo 2-2
08.10.05 Uganda-Burkina Faso 2-2

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
IVORY COAST	10	7	1	2	20	7	22
Cameroon	10	6	3	1	18	10	21
Egypt	10	5	2	3	26	15	17
Libya	10	3	3	4	8	10	12
Sudan	10	1	3	6	6	22	6
Benin	10	1	2	7	9	23	5

06.06.04 Cameroon-Benin..... 2-1
06.06.04 Ivory Coast-Libya 2-0
06.06.04 Sudan-Egypt 0-3
18.06.04 Libya-Cameroon 0-0
20.06.04 Benin-Sudan..... 1-1
20.06.04 Egypt-Ivory Coast..... 1-2
03.07.04 Sudan-Libya..... 0-1
04.07.04 Benin-Egypt 3-3
04.07.04 Cameroon-Ivory Coast 2-0
03.09.04 Libya-Benin..... 4-1
05.09.04 Egypt-Cameroon..... 3-2
05.09.04 Ivory Coast-Sudan 5-0
08.10.04 Libya-Egypt..... 2-1
09.10.04 Sudan-Cameroon..... 1-1
10.10.04 Benin-Ivory Coast 0-1
27.03.05 Cameroon-Sudan..... 2-1
27.03.05 Egypt-Libya..... 4-1
27.03.05 Ivory Coast-Benin 3-0
04.06.05 Libya-Ivory Coast 0-0
04.06.05 Benin-Cameroon..... 1-4
05.06.05 Egypt-Sudan 6-1
19.06.05 Cameroon-Libya 1-0
19.06.05 Ivory Coast-Egypt..... 2-0
17.08.05 Sudan-Benin 1-0
02.09.05 Libya-Sudan..... 0-0
04.09.05 Egypt-Benin 4-1
04.09.05 Ivory Coast-Cameroon 2-3
08.10.05 Cameroon-Egypt..... 1-1
08.10.05 Sudan-Ivory Coast 1-3
09.10.05 Benin-Libya..... 1-0

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ANGOLA	10	6	3	1	12	6	21
Nigeria	10	6	3	1	21	7	21
Zimbabwe	10	4	3	3	13	14	15
Gabon	10	2	4	4	11	13	10
Algeria	10	1	5	4	8	15	8
Rwanda	10	1	2	7	6	16	5

05.06.04 Algeria-Angola 0-0
05.06.04 Gabon-Zimbabwe 1-1
05.06.04 Nigeria-Rwanda..... 2-0
19.06.04 Rwanda-Gabon 3-1
20.06.04 Angola-Nigeria..... 1-0
20.06.04 Zimbabwe-Algeria 1-1
03.07.04 Gabon-Angola 2-2
03.07.04 Nigeria-Algeria..... 1-0
03.07.04 Rwanda-Zimbabwe..... 0-2
03.09.04 Zimbabwe-Nigeria 0-3
05.09.04 Algeria-Gabon 0-3
05.09.04 Angola-Rwanda 1-0
09.10.04 Gabon-Nigeria..... 1-1
09.10.04 Rwanda-Algeria 1-1
10.10.04 Angola-Zimbabwe..... 1-0
26.03.05 Nigeria-Gabon..... 2-0
27.03.05 Algeria-Rwanda 1-0
27.03.05 Zimbabwe-Angola..... 2-0
05.06.05 Angola-Algeria..... 2-1
05.06.05 Rwanda-Nigeria..... 1-1
05.06.05 Zimbabwe-Gabon 1-0
18.06.05 Gabon-Rwanda 3-0
18.06.05 Nigeria-Angola..... 1-1
19.06.05 Algeria-Zimbabwe 2-2
04.09.05 Algeria-Nigeria..... 2-5
04.09.05 Angola-Gabon 3-0
04.09.05 Zimbabwe-Rwanda..... 3-1
08.10.05 Gabon-Algeria..... 0-0
08.10.05 Nigeria-Zimbabwe 5-1
08.10.05 Rwanda-Angola 0-1

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TUNISIA	10	6	3	1	25	9	21
Morocco	10	5	5	0	17	7	20
Guinea	10	5	2	3	15	10	17
Kenya	10	3	1	6	8	17	10
Botswana	10	3	0	7	10	18	9
Malawi	10	1	3	6	12	26	6

05.06.04 Malawi-Morocco..... 1-1
05.06.04 Tunisia-Botswana 4-1
19.06.04 Botswana-Malawi 2-0
20.06.04 Guinea-Tunisia..... 2-1
03.07.04 Botswana-Morocco..... 0-1
03.07.04 Malawi-Guinea..... 1-1
04.09.04 Kenya-Malawi 3-2
04.09.04 Morocco-Tunisia 1-1
05.09.04 Guinea-Botswana 4-0
19.10.04 Botswana-Kenya..... 2-1

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09.10.04	Malawi-Tunisia	2-2
10.10.04	Guinea-Morocco	1-1
17.11.04	Kenya-Guinea	2-1
09.02.05	Morocco-Kenya	5-1
26.03.05	Kenya-Botswana	1-0
26.03.05	Morocco-Guinea	1-0
26.03.05	Tunisia-Malawi	7-0
04.06.05	Botswana-Tunisia	1-3
04.06.05	Morocco-Malawi	4-1
05.06.05	Guinea-Kenya	1-0
11.06.05	Tunisia-Guinea	2-0
18.06.05	Kenya-Morocco	0-0
18.06.05	Malawi-Botswana	1-3
17.08.05	Tunisia-Kenya	1-0
03.09.05	Kenya-Tunisia	0-2
03.09.05	Morocco-Botswana	1-0
04.09.05	Guinea-Malawi	3-1
08.10.05	Botswana-Guinea	1-2
08.10.05	Malawi-Kenya	3-0
08.10.05	Tunisia-Morocco	2-2

Group winners qualified for finals

ASIA

4.5 finals berths

2nd stage

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SAUDI ARABIA	6	4	2	0	10	1	14
SOUTH KOREA	6	3	1	2	9	5	10
Uzbekistan	6	1	2	3	7	11	5
Kuwait	6	1	1	4	4	13	4

09.02.05	South Korea-Kuwait	2-0
09.02.05	Uzbekistan-Saudi Arabia	1-1
25.03.05	Kuwait-Uzbekistan	2-1
25.03.05	Saudi Arabia-South Korea	2-0
30.03.05	Kuwait-Saudi Arabia	0-0
30.03.05	South Korea-Uzbekistan	2-1
03.06.05	Saudi Arabia-Kuwait	3-0
03.06.05	Uzbekistan-South Korea	1-1
08.06.05	Kuwait-South Korea	0-4
08.06.05	Saudi Arabia-Uzbekistan	3-0
17.08.05	South Korea-Saudi Arabia	0-1
17.08.05	Uzbekistan-Kuwait	3-2

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
JAPAN	6	5	0	1	9	4	15
IRAN	6	4	1	1	7	3	13
Bahrain	6	1	1	4	4	7	4
North Korea	6	1	0	5	5	11	3

09.02.05	Bahrain-Iran	0-0
09.02.05	Japan-North Korea	2-1
25.03.05	Iran-Japan	2-1
25.03.05	North Korea-Bahrain	1-2
30.03.05	Japan-Bahrain	1-0
30.03.05	North Korea-Iran	0-2
03.06.05	Iran-North Korea	1-0
03.06.05	Bahrain-Japan	0-1
08.06.05	Iran-Bahrain	1-0
08.06.05	North Korea-Japan	0-2
17.08.05	Bahrain-North Korea	2-3
17.08.05	Japan-Iran	2-1

Group winners and runners-up qualified for finals. The two third-placed teams entered the Asian play-off

Asian play-off

08.10.05	Uzbekistan-Bahrain	1-1
12.10.05	Bahrain-Uzbekistan	0-0

Agg 1-1. Bahrain on away goals

Bahrain met Trinidad & Tobago, the fourth-placed CONCACAF team, in the Asia-CONCACAF play-off for a place in finals

CONCACAF

3.5 finals berths

3rd stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UNITED STATES	10	7	1	2	16	6	22
MEXICO	10	7	1	2	22	9	22
COSTA RICA	10	5	1	4	15	14	16
Trinidad & Tob	10	4	1	5	10	15	13
Guatemala	10	3	2	5	16	18	11
Panama	10	0	2	8	4	21	2

09.02.05	Costa Rica-Mexico	1-2
09.02.05	Panama-Guatemala	0-0
09.02.05	Trinidad & Tob-United States	1-2
26.03.05	Costa Rica-Panama	2-1
26.03.05	Guatemala-Trinidad & Tob	5-1
27.03.05	Mexico-United States	2-1
30.03.05	Panama-Mexico	1-1
30.03.05	Trinidad & Tob-Costa Rica	0-0
30.03.05	United States-Guatemala	2-0
04.06.05	Guatemala-Mexico	0-2
04.06.05	Trinidad & Tob-Panama	2-0
04.06.05	United States-Costa Rica	3-0
08.06.05	Costa Rica-Guatemala	3-2
08.06.05	Mexico-Trinidad & Tob	2-0
08.06.05	Panama-United States	0-3
17.08.05	Guatemala-Panama	2-1
17.08.05	Mexico-Costa Rica	2-0
17.08.05	United States-Trinidad & Tob	1-0
03.09.05	Panama-Costa Rica	1-3
03.09.05	Trinidad & Tob-Guatemala	3-2
03.09.05	United States-Mexico	2-0
07.09.05	Costa Rica-Trinidad & Tob	2-0
07.09.05	Guatemala-United States	0-0
07.09.05	Mexico-Panama	5-0
08.10.05	Costa Rica-United States	3-0
08.10.05	Mexico-Guatemala	5-2
08.10.05	Panama-Trinidad & Tob	0-1
12.10.05	Guatemala-Costa Rica	3-1
12.10.05	Trinidad & Tob-Mexico	2-1
12.10.05	United States-Panama	2-0

Top three qualified for finals. Trinidad & Tobago met Bahrain, the winners of the Asian play-off, in the Asia-CONCACAF play-off for a place in finals

EUROPE

14 finals berths (including hosts Germany, who qualified automatically)

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HOLLAND	12	10	2	0	27	3	32
Czech Republic	12	9	0	3	35	12	27
Romania	12	8	1	3	20	10	25
Finland	12	5	1	6	21	19	16
Macedonia	12	2	3	7	11	24	9
Armenia	12	2	1	9	9	25	7
Andorra	12	1	2	9	4	34	5

18.08.04	Macedonia-Armenia	3-0
18.08.04	Romania-Finland	2-1
04.09.04	Finland-Andorra	3-0
04.09.04	Romania-Macedonia	2-1
08.09.04	Andorra-Romania	1-5
08.09.04	Armenia-Finland	0-2
08.09.04	Holland-Czech Republic	2-0
09.10.04	Czech Republic-Romania	1-0
09.10.04	Finland-Armenia	3-1
09.10.04	Macedonia-Holland	2-2
13.10.04	Andorra-Macedonia	1-0
13.10.04	Armenia-Czech Republic	0-3
13.10.04	Holland-Finland	3-1
17.11.04	Andorra-Holland	0-3
17.11.04	Armenia-Romania	1-1
17.11.04	Macedonia-Czech Republic	0-2
09.02.05	Macedonia-Andorra	0-0
26.03.05	Armenia-Andorra	2-1
26.03.05	Czech Republic-Finland	4-3
26.03.05	Romania-Holland	0-2
30.03.05	Andorra-Czech Republic	0-4
30.03.05	Holland-Armenia	2-0
30.03.05	Macedonia-Romania	1-2
04.06.05	Armenia-Macedonia	1-2
04.06.05	Czech Republic-Andorra	8-1
04.06.05	Holland-Romania	2-0
08.06.05	Czech Republic-Macedonia	6-1
08.06.05	Finland-Holland	0-4
08.06.05	Romania-Armenia	3-0
17.08.05	Macedonia-Finland	0-3
17.08.05	Romania-Andorra	2-0
03.09.05	Andorra-Finland	0-0
03.09.05	Armenia-Holland	0-1
03.09.05	Romania-Czech Republic	2-0
07.09.05	Czech Republic-Armenia	4-1
07.09.05	Finland-Macedonia	5-1
07.09.05	Holland-Andorra	4-0
08.10.05	Czech Republic-Holland	0-2
08.10.05	Finland-Romania	0-1
12.10.05	Andorra-Armenia	0-3
12.10.05	Finland-Czech Republic	0-3
12.10.05	Holland-Macedonia	0-0

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UKRAINE	12	7	4	1	18	7	25
Turkey	12	6	5	1	23	9	23
Denmark	12	6	4	2	24	12	22
Greece	12	6	3	3	15	9	21
Albania	12	4	1	7	11	20	13
Georgia	12	2	4	6	14	25	10
Kazakhstan	12	0	1	11	6	29	1

04.09.04	Albania-Greece	2-1
04.09.04	Denmark-Ukraine	1-1
04.09.04	Turkey-Georgia	1-1
08.09.04	Georgia-Albania	2-0

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QUALIFYING RESULTS

08.09.04	Greece-Turkey	0-0
08.09.04	Kazakhstan-Ukraine	1-2
09.10.04	Albania-Denmark	0-2
09.10.04	Turkey-Kazakhstan	4-0
09.10.04	Ukraine-Greece	1-1
13.10.04	Denmark-Turkey	1-1
13.10.04	Kazakhstan-Albania	0-1
13.10.04	Ukraine-Georgia	2-0
17.11.04	Georgia-Denmark	2-2
17.11.04	Greece-Kazakhstan	3-1
17.11.04	Turkey-Ukraine	0-3
09.02.05	Albania-Ukraine	0-2
09.02.05	Greece-Denmark	2-1
26.03.05	Denmark-Kazakhstan	3-0
26.03.05	Georgia-Greece	1-3
26.03.05	Turkey-Albania	2-0
30.03.05	Georgia-Turkey	2-5
30.03.05	Greece-Albania	2-0
30.03.05	Ukraine-Denmark	1-0
04.06.05	Albania-Georgia	3-2
04.06.05	Turkey-Greece	0-0
04.06.05	Ukraine-Kazakhstan	2-0
08.06.05	Denmark-Albania	3-1
08.06.05	Greece-Ukraine	0-1
08.06.05	Kazakhstan-Turkey	0-6
17.08.05	Kazakhstan-Georgia	1-2
03.09.05	Albania-Kazakhstan	2-1
03.09.05	Georgia-Ukraine	1-1
03.09.05	Turkey-Denmark	2-2
07.09.05	Denmark-Georgia	6-1
07.09.05	Kazakhstan-Greece	1-2
07.09.05	Ukraine-Turkey	0-1
08.10.05	Denmark-Greece	1-0
08.10.05	Georgia-Kazakhstan	0-0
08.10.05	Ukraine-Albania	2-2
12.10.05	Albania-Turkey	0-1
12.10.05	Greece-Georgia	1-0
12.10.05	Kazakhstan-Denmark	1-2

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
PORTUGAL	12	9	3	0	35	5	30
Slovakia	12	6	5	1	24	8	23
Russia	12	6	5	1	23	12	23
Estonia	12	5	2	5	16	17	17
Latvia	12	4	3	5	18	21	15
Liechtenstein	12	2	2	8	13	23	8
Luxembourg	12	0	0	12	5	48	0

18.08.04	Liechtenstein-Estonia	1-2
18.08.04	Slovakia-Luxembourg	3-1
04.09.04	Estonia-Luxembourg	4-0
04.09.04	Latvia-Portugal	0-2
04.09.04	Russia-Slovakia	1-1
08.09.04	Luxembourg-Latvia	3-4
08.09.04	Portugal-Estonia	4-0
08.09.04	Slovakia-Liechtenstein	7-0
09.10.04	Liechtenstein-Portugal	2-2
09.10.04	Luxembourg-Russia	0-4
09.10.04	Slovakia-Latvia	4-1
13.10.04	Latvia-Estonia	2-2
13.10.04	Luxembourg-Liechtenstein	0-4
13.10.04	Portugal-Russia	7-1
17.11.04	Liechtenstein-Latvia	1-3
17.11.04	Luxembourg-Portugal	0-5
17.11.04	Russia-Estonia	4-0
26.03.05	Estonia-Slovakia	1-2
26.03.05	Liechtenstein-Russia	1-2
30.03.05	Estonia-Russia	1-1
30.03.05	Latvia-Luxembourg	4-0
30.03.05	Slovakia-Portugal	1-1
04.06.05	Estonia-Liechtenstein	2-0
04.06.05	Portugal-Slovakia	2-0
04.06.05	Russia-Latvia	2-0
08.06.05	Estonia-Portugal	0-1
08.06.05	Latvia-Liechtenstein	1-0
08.06.05	Luxembourg-Slovakia	0-4
17.08.05	Latvia-Russia	1-1
17.08.05	Liechtenstein-Slovakia	0-0
03.09.05	Estonia-Latvia	2-1
03.09.05	Portugal-Luxembourg	6-0
03.09.05	Russia-Liechtenstein	2-0
07.09.05	Latvia-Slovakia	1-1
07.09.05	Liechtenstein-Luxembourg	3-0
07.09.05	Russia-Portugal	0-0
08.10.05	Portugal-Liechtenstein	2-1
08.10.05	Russia-Luxembourg	5-1
08.10.05	Slovakia-Estonia	1-0
12.10.05	Luxembourg-Estonia	0-2
12.10.05	Portugal-Latvia	3-0
12.10.05	Slovakia-Russia	0-0

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FRANCE	10	5	5	0	14	2	20
Switzerland	10	4	6	0	18	7	18
Israel	10	4	6	0	15	10	18
Rep Ireland	10	4	5	1	12	5	17
Cyprus	10	1	1	8	8	20	4
Faroe Islands	10	0	1	9	4	27	1

04.09.04	France-Israel	0-0
04.09.04	Rep Ireland-Cyprus	3-0
04.09.04	Switzerland-Faroe Islands	6-0
08.09.04	Faroe Islands-France	0-2
08.09.04	Israel-Cyprus	2-1
08.09.04	Switzerland-Rep Ireland	1-1
09.10.04	Cyprus-Faroe Islands	2-2
09.10.04	France-Rep Ireland	0-0
09.10.04	Israel-Switzerland	2-2
13.10.04	Cyprus-France	0-2
13.10.04	Rep Ireland-Faroe Islands	2-0
17.11.04	Cyprus-Israel	1-2
26.03.05	France-Switzerland	0-0
26.03.05	Israel-Rep Ireland	1-1
30.03.05	Israel-France	1-1
30.03.05	Switzerland-Cyprus	1-0
04.06.05	Faroe Islands-Switzerland	1-3
04.06.05	Rep Ireland-Israel	2-2
08.06.05	Faroe Islands-Rep Ireland	0-2
17.08.05	Faroe Islands-Cyprus	0-3
03.09.05	France-Faroe Islands	3-0
03.09.05	Switzerland-Israel	1-1
07.09.05	Cyprus-Switzerland	1-3
07.09.05	Faroe Islands-Israel	0-2
07.09.05	Rep Ireland-France	0-1
08.10.05	Cyprus-Rep Ireland	0-1
08.10.05	Israel-Faroe Islands	2-1
08.10.05	Switzerland-France	1-1
12.10.05	France-Cyprus	4-0
12.10.05	Rep Ireland-Switzerland	0-0

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ITALY	10	7	2	1	17	8	23
Norway	10	5	3	2	12	7	18
Scotland	10	3	4	3	9	7	13
Slovenia	10	3	3	4	10	13	12
Belarus	10	2	4	4	12	14	10
Moldova	10	1	2	7	5	16	5

04.09.04	Italy-Norway	2-1
04.09.04	Slovenia-Belarus	2-0
08.09.04	Moldova-Italy	0-1
08.09.04	Norway-Belarus	1-1
08.09.04	Scotland-Slovenia	0-0
09.10.04	Belarus-Moldova	4-0
09.10.04	Scotland-Norway	0-1
09.10.04	Slovenia-Italy	1-0
13.10.04	Italy-Belarus	4-3
13.10.04	Moldova-Scotland	1-1
13.10.04	Norway-Slovenia	3-0
26.03.05	Italy-Scotland	2-0
30.03.05	Moldova-Norway	0-0
30.03.05	Slovenia-Belarus	1-1
04.06.05	Belarus-Slovenia	1-1
04.06.05	Norway-Italy	0-0
04.06.05	Scotland-Moldova	2-0
08.06.05	Belarus-Scotland	0-0
03.09.05	Moldova-Belarus	2-0
03.09.05	Scotland-Italy	1-1
03.09.05	Slovenia-Norway	2-3
07.09.05	Belarus-Italy	1-4
07.09.05	Moldova-Slovenia	1-2
07.09.05	Norway-Scotland	1-2
08.10.05	Italy-Slovenia	1-0
08.10.05	Norway-Moldova	1-0
08.10.05	Scotland-Belarus	0-1
12.10.05	Belarus-Norway	0-1
12.10.05	Italy-Moldova	2-1
12.10.05	Slovenia-Scotland	0-3

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ENGLAND	10	8	1	1	17	5	25
POLAND	10	8	0	2	27	9	24
Austria	10	4	3	3	15	12	15
N Ireland	10	2	3	5	10	18	9
Wales	10	2	2	6	10	15	8
Azerbaijan	10	0	3	7	1	21	3

04.09.04	Austria-England	2-2
04.09.04	Azerbaijan-Wales	1-1
04.09.04	Northern Ireland-Poland	0-3
08.09.04	Austria-Azerbaijan	2-0
08.09.04	Poland-England	1-2
08.09.04	Wales-Northern Ireland	2-2
09.10.04	Austria-Poland	1-3
09.10.04	Azerbaijan-Northern Ireland	0-0
09.10.04	England-Wales	2-0
13.10.04	Azerbaijan-England	0-1
13.10.04	Northern Ireland-Austria	3-3
13.10.04	Wales-Poland	2-3
26.03.05	England-Northern Ireland	4-0
26.03.05	Poland-Azerbaijan	8-0
26.03.05	Wales-Austria	0-2
30.03.05	Austria-Wales	1-0
30.03.05	England-Azerbaijan	2-0
30.03.05	Poland-Northern Ireland	1-0
04.06.05	Azerbaijan-Poland	0-3
03.09.05	Northern Ireland-Azerbaijan	2-0
03.09.05	Poland-Austria	3-2
03.09.05	Wales-England	0-1
07.09.05	Azerbaijan-Austria	0-0
07.09.05	Northern Ireland-England	1-0
07.09.05	Poland-Wales	1-0
08.10.05	England-Austria	1-0
08.10.05	Northern Ireland-Wales	2-3
12.10.05	Austria-Northern Ireland	2-0
12.10.05	England-Poland	2-1
12.10.05	Wales-Azerbaijan	2-0

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Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SERBIA & M	10	6	4	0	16	1	22
Spain	10	5	5	0	19	3	20
Bosnia-Herz	10	4	4	2	12	9	16
Belgium	10	3	3	4	16	11	12
Lithuania	10	2	4	4	8	9	10
San Marino	10	0	0	10	2	40	0

04.09.04 Belgium-Lithuania 1-1
04.09.04 San Marino-Serbia & M'negro .. 0-3
08.09.04 Bosnia-Herz-Spain..... 1-1
08.09.04 Lithuania-San Marino 4-0
09.10.04 Bosnia-Herz-Serbia & M'negro .. 0-0
09.10.04 Spain-Belgium 2-0
13.10.04 Lithuania-Spain 0-0
13.10.04 Serbia & M'negro-San Marino .. 5-0
17.11.04 Belgium-Serbia & M'negro 0-2
17.11.04 San Marino-Lithuania 0-1
09.02.05 Spain-San Marino..... 5-0
26.03.05 Belgium-Bosnia-Herz..... 4-1
30.03.05 Bosnia-Herz-Lithuania..... 1-1
30.03.05 San Marino-Belgium..... 1-2
30.03.05 Serbia & M'negro-Spain 0-0
04.06.05 San Marino-Bosnia-Herz 1-3
04.06.05 Serbia & M'negro-Belgium 0-0
04.06.05 Spain-Lithuania 1-0
08.06.05 Spain-Bosnia-Herz..... 1-1
03.09.05 Bosnia-Herz-Belgium..... 1-0
03.09.05 Serbia & M'negro-Lithuania..... 2-0
07.09.05 Belgium-San Marino..... 8-0
07.09.05 Lithuania-Bosnia-Herz..... 0-1
07.09.05 Spain-Serbia & M'negro 1-1
08.10.05 Belgium-Spain 0-2
08.10.05 Bosnia-Herz-San Marino 3-0
08.10.05 Lithuania-Serbia & M'negro..... 0-2
12.10.05 Lithuania-Belgium 1-1
12.10.05 San Marino-Spain..... 0-6
12.10.05 Serbia & M'negro-Bosnia-Herz .. 1-0

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CROATIA	10	7	3	0	21	5	24
SWEDEN	10	8	0	2	30	4	24
Bulgaria	10	4	3	3	17	17	15
Hungary	10	4	2	4	13	14	14
Iceland	10	1	1	8	14	27	4
Malta	10	0	3	7	4	32	3

04.09.04 Croatia-Hungary 3-0
04.09.04 Iceland-Bulgaria 1-3
04.09.04 Malta-Sweden 0-7
08.09.04 Hungary-Iceland 3-2
08.09.04 Sweden-Croatia 0-1
09.10.04 Croatia-Bulgaria..... 2-2
09.10.04 Malta-Iceland..... 0-0
09.10.04 Sweden-Hungary..... 3-0
13.10.04 Bulgaria-Malta 4-1
13.10.04 Iceland-Sweden..... 1-4
17.11.04 Malta-Hungary..... 0-2
26.03.05 Bulgaria-Sweden 0-3
26.03.05 Croatia-Iceland 4-0
30.03.05 Croatia-Malta..... 3-0
30.03.05 Hungary-Bulgaria..... 1-1
04.06.05 Bulgaria-Croatia..... 1-3
04.06.05 Iceland-Hungary 2-3
04.06.05 Sweden-Malta 6-0
08.06.05 Iceland-Malta..... 4-1
03.09.05 Hungary-Malta..... 4-0
03.09.05 Iceland-Croatia 1-3
03.09.05 Sweden-Bulgaria..... 3-0
07.09.05 Bulgaria-Iceland 3-2
07.09.05 Hungary-Sweden..... 0-1
07.09.05 Malta-Croatia..... 1-1
08.10.05 Bulgaria-Hungary..... 2-0
08.10.05 Croatia-Sweden..... 1-0
12.10.05 Hungary-Croatia 0-0
12.10.05 Malta-Bulgaria..... 1-1
12.10.05 Sweden-Iceland..... 3-1

Group winners and the two best runners-up qualified for finals. The other six runners-up were paired in three play-off matches for a place in finals*

**Group runners-up were ranked according to their results against the teams finishing 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th in their respective groups*

OCEANIA

0.5 finals berths

3rd stage

03.09.05 Australia-Solomon Islands..... 7-0
06.09.05 Solomon Islands-Australia..... 1-2
Australia 9-1 on agg

Australia met Uruguay, the fifth-placed South American team, in the Oceania-South America play-off for a place in finals

SOUTH AMERICA

4.5 finals berths

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BRAZIL	18	9	7	2	35	17	34
ARGENTINA	18	10	4	4	29	17	34
ECUADOR	18	8	4	6	23	19	28
PARAGUAY	18	8	4	6	23	23	28
Uruguay	18	6	7	5	23	28	25
Colombia	18	6	6	6	24	16	24
Chile	18	5	7	6	18	22	22
Venezuela	18	5	3	10	20	28	18
Peru	18	4	6	8	20	28	18
Bolivia	18	4	2	12	20	37	14

06.09.03 Argentina-Chile..... 2-2
06.09.03 Ecuador-Venezuela..... 2-0
06.09.03 Peru-Paraguay..... 4-1
07.09.03 Colombia-Brazil..... 1-2
07.09.03 Uruguay-Bolivia..... 5-0
09.09.03 Chile-Peru..... 2-1
09.09.03 Venezuela-Argentina 0-3
10.09.03 Bolivia-Colombia 4-0
10.09.03 Brazil-Ecuador..... 1-0
10.09.03 Paraguay-Uruguay..... 4-1
15.11.03 Argentina-Bolivia..... 3-0
15.11.03 Colombia-Venezuela..... 0-1
15.11.03 Paraguay-Ecuador..... 2-1
15.11.03 Uruguay-Chile..... 2-1
16.11.03 Peru-Brazil..... 1-1
18.11.03 Chile-Paraguay 0-1
18.11.03 Venezuela-Bolivia..... 2-1
19.11.03 Brazil-Uruguay..... 3-3
19.11.03 Colombia-Argentina..... 1-1
19.11.03 Ecuador-Peru..... 0-0
30.03.04 Argentina-Ecuador 1-0
30.03.04 Bolivia-Chile 0-2
31.03.04 Paraguay-Brazil..... 0-0
31.03.04 Peru-Colombia..... 0-2
31.03.04 Uruguay-Venezuela 0-3
01.06.04 Bolivia-Paraguay 2-1
01.06.04 Uruguay-Peru 1-3
01.06.04 Venezuela-Chile..... 0-1
02.06.04 Brazil-Argentina 3-1
02.06.04 Ecuador-Colombia 2-1
05.06.04 Ecuador-Bolivia 3-2
06.06.04 Argentina-Paraguay..... 0-0
06.06.04 Chile-Brazil 1-1
06.06.04 Colombia-Uruguay..... 5-0
06.06.04 Peru-Venezuela 0-0
04.09.04 Peru-Argentina 1-3
05.09.04 Brazil-Bolivia 3-1
05.09.04 Chile-Colombia 0-0
05.09.04 Paraguay-Venezuela..... 1-0
05.09.04 Uruguay-Ecuador..... 1-0
09.10.04 Argentina-Uruguay 4-2
09.10.04 Bolivia-Peru..... 1-0
09.10.04 Colombia-Paraguay 1-1
09.10.04 Venezuela-Brazil..... 2-5
10.10.04 Ecuador-Chile 2-0
12.10.04 Bolivia-Uruguay 0-0
13.10.04 Brazil-Colombia 0-0
13.10.04 Chile-Argentina..... 0-0
13.10.04 Paraguay-Peru..... 1-1
14.10.04 Venezuela-Ecuador..... 3-1
17.11.04 Argentina-Venezuela 3-2
17.11.04 Colombia-Bolivia 1-0
17.11.04 Ecuador-Brazil 1-0
17.11.04 Peru-Chile..... 2-1
17.11.04 Uruguay-Paraguay..... 1-0
26.03.05 Bolivia-Argentina..... 1-2
26.03.05 Chile-Uruguay..... 1-1
26.03.05 Venezuela-Colombia..... 0-0
27.03.05 Brazil-Peru..... 1-0
27.03.05 Ecuador-Paraguay 5-2
29.03.05 Bolivia-Venezuela..... 3-1
30.03.05 Argentina-Colombia..... 1-0
30.03.05 Paraguay-Chile 2-1
30.03.05 Peru-Ecuador..... 2-2
30.03.05 Uruguay-Brazil..... 1-1
04.06.05 Chile-Bolivia 3-1
04.06.05 Colombia-Peru..... 5-0
04.06.05 Ecuador-Argentina..... 2-0
04.06.05 Venezuela-Uruguay 1-1
05.06.05 Brazil-Paraguay..... 4-1
07.06.05 Peru-Uruguay 0-0
08.06.05 Argentina-Brazil 3-1
08.06.05 Chile-Venezuela..... 2-1
08.06.05 Colombia-Ecuador..... 3-0
08.06.05 Paraguay-Bolivia 4-1
03.09.05 Bolivia-Ecuador 1-2
03.09.05 Paraguay-Argentina..... 1-0
03.09.05 Venezuela-Peru 4-1
04.09.05 Brazil-Chile 5-0
04.09.05 Uruguay-Colombia..... 3-2
08.10.05 Colombia-Chile 1-1
08.10.05 Ecuador-Uruguay..... 0-0
08.10.05 Venezuela-Paraguay..... 0-1
09.10.05 Argentina-Peru 2-0
09.10.05 Bolivia-Brazil 1-1
12.10.05 Brazil-Venezuela..... 3-0
12.10.05 Chile-Ecuador..... 0-0
12.10.05 Paraguay-Colombia..... 0-1
12.10.05 Peru-Bolivia..... 4-1
12.10.05 Uruguay-Argentina 1-0

Top four qualified for finals. Uruguay met Australia, the Oceania section winners, in the Oceania-South America play-off for a place in finals

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